

THE PURSUIT OF HEGEMONY

School Shootings as Cultural Scripts



The Pursuit of Hegemony
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BY

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ABSTRACT

The Pursuit of Hegemony - School Shootings as Cultural Scripts

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As attested by the amount of related media coverage, school shootings seem have become an important public concern in the last decade. While this phenomenon has enjoyed a wide coverage in the media, there is only a limited amount of scholarly research available on the subject. Furthermore, research on Canadian school shootings is practically inexistent. Focusing on the Dawson school shooting as a case study, this thesis hypothesizes that the repetitive occurrences of school shootings reveal a deeper social malaise regarding masculinity in North America. By carefully studying school shooting occurrences from 1996 to 2006 as well their news media coverage, this thesis proposes that we gain important insights into the culture of masculinity and gender relations in contemporary North America.

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The Pursuit of Hegemony

School Shootings as Cultural Scripts

“Do you have an office pass, Mr. Decker?”
“Yes,” I said, and took out the pistol out of my belt.
I wasn't even sure it was loaded until it went off.
I shot her in the head.”
Rage, Novel by Richard Bachman, 1977

School shootings have been making North American headlines quite regularly for the past decade. While only a limited amount of scholarly work has been conducted on this topic, the large amount of related media coverage, including news articles, special reports and television exposés attests to the widespread public interest. Of the limited group of scholars who have studied the phenomenon, anthropologist Katherine Newman may be the only one to touch on an important aspect of school shootings that had as-of-yet remained undiscussed. In her book *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*, Newman makes an insightful remark about the nature of school shootings: “Cultural scripts - prescriptions for behavior - must be available to lead the way toward an armed attack” (Newman:2004:230). With this crucial proposition, Newman opens the door towards a new way of thinking about school shootings: namely, to explore them as cultural scripts. While Newman does not specify what she understands by cultural scripts other than prescriptions for behavior, we can refer to the groundbreaking work of sociologists William Simon and John H. Gagnon for a more in-depth description of the concept:

“Scripts are a metaphor for conceptualizing the production of behavior within social life. Most of social life most of the time must operate under the guidance of an operating syntax, much as language is a precondition for speech. For behavior to occur, something resembling scripting must occur (...).”
(Simon, Gagnon:2007:31)

Thus from Simon and Gagnon's work, we understand that for behavior to occur, a cultural script must be present to shape the context and conditions for this behavior. Anthropologist Anna Wierzbicka has also explored the concept of cultural scripts as central to her work on language and culture. In her article *Russian Cultural Scripts: The Theory of Cultural Scripts and Its applications* she proposes that cultural scripts "are representations of cultural norms that are widely held in a given society and that are reflected in language (Wierzbicka:2002:401)". Thus, adding to Simon and Gagnon's proposition that scripts are precursors for behavior, and based on Wiersbicka research about the scripts' application in language, we can speculate that cultural scripts must be widely accepted cultural norms in a given society. One can object here that mass shootings are not a cultural norm; indeed if this were the case we would see these incidents in much higher numbers. However, my research posits that, while school shootings are not a cultural norm, the school shooting script is a reflection of the dominant norms of masculinity in contemporary North America. In fact, the script embedded in school shootings is best described and understood through the concept of hegemonic masculinity introduced by gender scholar Raewyn Connell (1987, 1992, 1989, 2005). While this concept will be further elaborated in my theoretical framework, it suffices to say for now that hegemonic masculinity is associated with a type of cultural dominance, and is usually characterized by traits such as success, stoicism, dominance, invulnerability and violence. Connell argues that masculinity therefore guarantee men a superior social position while relegating women and other types of masculinities to the subordinate position. While hegemonic masculinity is certainly not the norm among men, it is often viewed as the ideal standard against which they are measured.

What is then proposed by Newman and corroborated by Wierzbicka, Simon and Gagnon is that, once brought into existence, a cultural script, even a violent and destructive one like school shootings, will become a viable option – albeit to a small number of young men – to reenact. She calls this option the 'masculine exit'.

She writes:

"The shooting solves two problems at once: it provides them the "exit" they are seeking and it overturns the social hierarchy, establishing once and for all that they are, in Luke Whoodham's word, "gutsy and daring"

not “weak and slow-witted”. The problem is, they didn’t just fail at popularity – they failed at the very specific task of ‘manhood’, or at least they felt that way.” (Newman:2004:269).

This important breakthrough in school shooting research brings new questions to the table, most importantly, what attracts young men in particular to this script? Newman offers this possible explanation:

“We speculate that the cultural script involved in most school shootings is a particularly male enterprise, and not just because boys are the ones who have turned up as shooters. The evidence leading to cultural patterns that sanction male violence, that throw up for our collective admiration the gutsy shooter, appeals to boys who are socially excluded.” (Newman:2004:267).

The following thesis will build on Newman’s idea of the ‘masculine exit,’ —discussed only briefly in Newman’s own work— arguing that school shootings must be studied through the lens of cultural scripts in order to reveal how and why they operate as they do. This analysis also aims to sow more fertile ground, with the hope of beginning to answer one of the most important questions regarding this topic: why do school shootings occur? This research hypothesizes that the repetitive occurrences of school shootings reveal a deeper social malaise regarding hegemonic masculinity and the culture that idealizes it. When carefully studying school shooting occurrences as well their news media coverage, we gain important insights into the culture of masculinity and gender relations in contemporary North America.

❖ Thesis Layout

This thesis consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, I will start by contextualizing school shootings in North America. This chapter will end with an overview of the limited body of scholarly work that has focused on school shootings. Divided in several sections, chapter one will show that the work that has been done so far on the subject leaves important gaps in the research of school shootings. In the literature review, we will see that the body of work that has explored the issue of school shooting leaves several questions unanswered and that, most importantly, masculinity as it relates to school shooting has been for the most part ignored by scholars.

Chapter two will present the theoretical background of this research, namely the fields of criminal and media anthropology as well as the key concept of hegemonic masculinity. This will be followed by a section on methodology, which will detail how this research was conducted and how the data was collected. It will also present the key contributions that the thesis makes to the field of school shooting research.

In Chapter three, *Exploring the Masculine Exit*, we will trace the cultural script of school shootings between 1996 to 2006 in the United States and Canada. Using a thematic analysis, and working within the cultural script framework, we will see the key elements that are repeatedly used to understand school shootings. These elements and their relation to masculinity will also be presented in this chapter.

Finally, in chapter four we will analyze how previous school shootings and their media coverage contributed to the cultural script that was enacted by Kimveer Gill at Dawson College. This research offers the first attempt to study and analyze the Dawson School shooting from a scholarly perspective. Furthermore, this analysis of a Canadian case study in school shooting research as well as the data it presents is unprecedented. In chapter 4, we will discuss the presence of the key elements of the cultural script in the planning and execution of the rampage by the shooter as well as the continuation of the script through the coverage of the shooting.

In conclusion, this research aims to show that, firstly, school shootings are decisively a cultural script. Secondly, that these scripts are inextricably linked to a hegemonic rendering of masculinity culture as it currently stands in contemporary North America. Therefore the most effective way of understanding the school shooting cultural script is through Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter I

Context & Literature Review

❖ School Shootings, An Overview

Before going into depth, one of the interests of this research is to uncover the beginning of the school shooting cultural script in order to see what can be learned from its genesis. Like any cultural script, it is difficult to pinpoint the moment when school shootings became more than the sum of their parts - namely, a shooting on a school ground. We can, however, suggest a possible first incident in order to support the proposition that school shootings have become cultural scripts. Indeed, by tracing the cultural script we identify which specific shooting on a school ground became so emblematic that, from that moment on, the term would evoke much more than the event itself, but rather a series of complex ideas about masculinity, gun culture and bullying; that is a cultural script to be enacted by others seeking similar outcomes. In order to effectively make sense of school shootings as cultural scripts, I have, among other things, carefully studied past mediatized events in both Canada and the United States in order to find this appropriate starting point for the discussion.

School shootings are not solely a '1990s plague' as suggested by the CBS 1999 documentary *School Shootings: America's Tragedy*. Rather, similar incidents have been recorded as early as the 1940s and also throughout the 60s and 70s (or even earlier, if we take into consideration, a particular incident occurring in 1764, deemed by many to be the 'first' school shooting). The current cultural script of a school shooting however – specifically the narrative of a misfit young man wearing army gear and/or a black trench coat, shooting randomly at the students who have caused him misery – can really be traced back to one particular incident: the Frontier Middle

School shooting in 1996. The Frontier Middle School shooting stands out from previous school shootings due to the media focus on the shooting's 'randomness' and the fact that the shooter had been bullied. These speculations, which are rarely found in the media coverage prior to this incident, will become common explanations for subsequent school shootings. Hence, media coverage of prior school shootings appears to influence subsequent incidents and inspires future school shooters through the propagation of an increasingly well-established cultural script.

❖ The Frontier Middle School Shooting

On Friday February 2nd, 1996, three years before Columbine high school would make national headlines, 14 year old student Barry Loukaitis held his algebra class hostage after shooting two students and a teacher. During this ten minute explosion of teenage angst, Barry is alleged to have exclaimed: "This sure beats algebra doesn't it?!", an obscure reference to Stephen King's novel titled *Rage*. This short novel had been published ten years earlier under the author's early pseudonym Richard Bachman. The book, which Loukaitis is reported to have read repeatedly according to court files, relates the story of a young man who, feeling insecure with regards to his masculine identity, holds his math class hostage at gunpoint after shooting his teacher. King's story was, in fact, part of a wider cultural trend of media focus on violence in schools including shootings on school grounds, that had been occurring sporadically, here and there in the USA throughout the 60s and 70s as mentioned above. Most of these shootings involved a specific target and were reported in the news media as murders rather than rampage killings. None of these previous events had captured national headlines or sparked soul-searching debates about gun control or violent media in the US.

Since King's novel has appeared several times in connection with similar events, he has allowed it to go out of print. On the connection between his first novels (*Rage*, 1977 and *Carrie*, 1974) and other school shooting incidents, Stephen King remarked:

"My stories of adolescent violence were all drawn, in some degree, from my own memories of high school. That particular

truth, as I recalled it when writing as an adult, was unpleasant enough. I remember high school as a time of misery and resentment. In Iroquois trials of manhood, naked warriors were sent running down a gauntlet of braves swinging clubs and jabbing with the butt ends of spears. In high school the goal is Graduation Day instead of a manhood feather, and the weapons are replaced by insults, slights, and epithets, many of them racial, but I imagine the feelings are about the same” (Stephen King's Keynote Address, Vermont Library Conference, VEMA Annual Meeting, May 26th 1999).

In this quote from one of the most popular writers in North America, a clear link is drawn between adolescent violence and masculinity. These themes also are prominent, if not central, in most of King’s best-selling books. With the inclusion of what King calls the ‘Iroquois trials of manhood’ as a comparison to American high-school culture, we get an insightful glimpse into the importance of ‘proving’ masculinity through physical violence. It is important to mention that this research does not aim to propose that masculinity is inherently violent, in fact several research have shown that violence in schools, both physical and psychological, is an important concern for both gender (see for example Artz, 1998). However, since the focus of this research is the contemporary construction of masculinity in a North American context, we will see more precisely an abundance of references to similar themes and explore how they are part of everyday social life for young men in North America. Elsewhere in King’s address, he coins an interesting term to refer to the two infamous Columbine high-school shooters, a title which he then uses to refer to school shooters in general. He writes: “Harris and Klebold, too young to be bogeymen; call them bogeyboys if you like. I think that fits them very well” (Vermont Library Conference, VEMA Annual Meeting, May 26, 1999). King then goes on to discuss other bogeyboys and the indelible trace they leave on North American popular culture. The term bogeyboys is a suitable epithet for school shooters as it successfully evokes both the desire to generate fear in those around them as well as the attempt to gain some kind of social standing from that fear. Bogeyboys also captures the importance of fear and violence as they relate to masculinity culture, or rather masculinity cultures. The cultures of masculinity and the various

cultural scripts they offer - some violent, some not - are never questioned or mentioned as factors in the occurrence of school shootings by both scholars who have researched these incidents and by news media who cover these incidents regularly. In what follows, I will argue that the time has now come to explore school shootings as cultural scripts that are bound up with the social construction of manhood and masculinity in contemporary western cultures. Furthermore, I will show that, when resting on the premise that school shootings are essentially social events constructed communally, we gain much more insight into the ever important question “why?” which in turn teaches us a great deal about our culture and the current state of it’s gender norms.

❖ The Cultural Script

First, let us return to the case of the Frontier middle school shooting. Since this case can be seen as the beginning of something bigger, it is only fitting to dig a bit deeper into the past in order to understand why Barry Loukaitis’s story stood out in the chain of school shootings that occurred in the United States since the early 60s. Back in 1996, in the days following the shooting, several elements of Loukaitis’s social life emerged in the media and were proposed as factors leading to his actions. For example, a local paper, the *Ellensburg Daily Record* reported that Loukaitis strongly identified with the main character of King’s novel as he himself struggled with asserting his masculine identity in his high school social life. In his taped confession with the police, he talked about being disrespected and called ‘a faggot’ many times a day when he was in high school. Furthermore, Barry made several allusions to the nature of his relationship with his mother, which can be described as overbearing. When he was told during his confession that she had hired an attorney for him and that, as a result, he had to stop his testimony, he said: “This should be my business, but of course it’s my mother’s” (*Ellensburg Daily Record*, September 4, 1996, p4). Another story discussed during the court hearings details a shopping trip undertaken by Barry and his mother in search of a black trench coat. Beth Anderson, a store clerk, testified in court that Barry had asked her for a longer coat (which, we later learned, was to successfully hide the shotgun he was planning on bringing to school). She replied to him that this was “a man’s coat and already fit him longer than probably was the norm” (*Ellensburg Daily Record*, September 4, 1996, p4). This remark testifies to Loukaitis’s desire to dress like a man to

accomplish his ultimate masculine exit. This is precisely the coat he wore when he went on his rampage, looking very much like the main character of his alleged favorite movie *Natural Born Killers* a fitting attire for someone who wanted to take his performance of masculinity into his own hands in order to show, much like King's character, that he was indeed 'The Man'.

In the aftermath of the wave of school shootings in the 90s, some print journalists looked back at Barry's story and saw in it the beginning of a national outbreak of adolescent angst. Most notable is the article "Where rampage begins: A Special Report; From Adolescent Angst To Shooting Up Schools" by *New York Times* journalist Timothy Egan, published on June 14th 1998. Only a couple of months after Egan's article, school shootings would once again make the *New York Times* headlines, this time not concerned with finding the beginning, but rather with displaying with much horror the apex of this 'Adolescent Angst'. Barry's story included several key elements that became defining tropes in the school shooting cultural script: the black trench coat, the misfit student turned shooter, the elaborate planning of the rampage as well as the interest in movies such as *Natural Born Killers* and novels like King's *Rage*.

I. *Contextualizing school shootings*

School shootings are intensely mediatized events. This increase in media attention has led to the perception that school shootings have begun occurring more frequently. However, scholarly discussions about school shootings have revealed some surprising facts. In his research on school shootings, sociologist Glenn Muschert assures us that fewer than 2% of homicides of school-age children occur on school grounds (Muschert: 2007:61). He goes on to state:

"It was the intense media coverage of the famous incidents (...) that created the public perception of school shootings as an emergent and increasing social problem. The school shootings problem as broadly recognized had more to do with the media coverage of recent incidents than actual changes in levels of

violence in schools” (Muschert:2007:65).

Muschert writes that this increased media coverage, which focuses primarily on rampage shootings, exists within a much wider historical context of public anxiety about crime and disaster. This public anxiety had reached its all-time high in the early 2000s (Muschert 2007; Muschert and Carr 2006). Although the incidence of school shootings has been slowly rising since 2001, they currently occur significantly less often than during the 1994-1999 era, with one to three episodes a year as compared to the six episodes peak in 1999 (Newman 2004, Muschert 2007). In reality, schools are still the safest place for children to be (Newman 2004).

As I mentioned earlier, a small but growing body of scholarly work has explored the phenomenon of school shooting (Muschert 2007, Preti 2007, Newman 2004). Of this scholarly work, only a very small proportion considers the relationship between the social construction of masculinity and school shootings. Gender scholar and activist Jason Katz, whose work on masculinity and violence is well known [see for example his acclaimed 1999 documentary *Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity*], has written the following as an advice to news media on how to cover the Newtown School shooting, where, on December 14th 2012, a young man killed 26 elementary school children and staff member:

“Make gender -- specifically the idea that men are gendered beings -- a central part of the national conversation about rampage killings. Typical news accounts and commentaries about school shootings and rampage killings rarely mention gender. If a woman were the shooter, you can bet there would be all sorts of commentary about shifting cultural notions of femininity and how they might have contributed to her act, such as discussions in recent years about girl gang violence. That same conversation about gender should take place when a man is the perpetrator. Men are every bit as gendered as women. (Katz, 2012)”

While the media do not appear to have heeded his advice, the present research will clearly demonstrate that the gendered aspects are, without a doubt, among the most relevant issues to look at when analyzing such events.

As masculinity scholar James W. Messerschmidt writes:

“Because masculinity is a behavioral response to the particular conditions and situations in which men participate, different types of masculinity exist in the school, the youth group, the street, the family, and the workplace. In other words, men *do* masculinity according to the social situation in which they find themselves” (Messerschmidt in Evans & Jamieson: 2008: 169, emphasis added).

In other words, Messerschmidt stresses the *performed* aspect of masculinity rather than its biological underpinnings. The school shooters, including Barry Loukaitis, Kip Kinkel, the Columbine boys, Andrew Williams, and Kimveer Gill, to name a few, were indeed *performing* masculinity in a very precise and explicit way through the school shooting cultural script they followed. Why these boys decided to perform masculinity in such a violent fashion has not yet been fully explored. It is precisely this exploration that this research undertakes. In order to understand what we already know about school shootings, the following chapter will review a selected body of literature that has focused on the issue from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

II. Defining school shootings

Researchers have tended to employ varying definitions of the term “school shooting” based on what best suits the theoretical framework of their research focus. It is indeed important to clarify what the current research means when referring to the term ‘school shooting’. For the purpose of this research, which explores the *construction* of school shooting, a school shooting must be distinguished from a rampage shooting and a murder. In order to make these distinctions, I have

taken the following characteristics into account: First, a school shooting must occur on school grounds. Secondly, a school shooting must involve a single individual or a group of individuals who have planned their assault before carrying it out. Indeed rampage shootings are the result of careful planning and not the result of sudden blinding rage or a spur of the moment. The perpetrators may be adolescents or young adults. A school shooter chooses his victims for their symbolic values as victims, but does not target them specifically. This last point is consistent with the findings of most researchers: school shooters are often surprised to learn the identity of their victims (Newman 2004). Finally and most importantly, the shooting must be perceived as a 'school shooting' by the media, and compared to, or interpreted in the vein of, similar events. Most researchers, like Newman (2004), have decided to exclude adult shooters as school shooters. However, adult school shooters like Kimveer Gill, Seung-Hui Cho and Alvaro Castillo to name a few have clearly identified themselves as school shooters by often comparing themselves to previous teenage school shooters in their writings or recordings. This is why I consider the Dawson College shooting a school shooting: Gill planned his assault nearly a year in advance; he identified himself with other school shooters, namely the Columbine pair; he chose his victims at random for being 'jocks' without having any type of personal connection to any of them. In fact, he had never even attended Dawson College and had considered four other universities and two other colleges before settling on Dawson College as the center stage for his violent masculinity display.

III. School Shootings Now

As we now know, school shootings have become a major preoccupation in Western societies; they are now part of our popular culture with repeated references made to them in films, books, songs and television specials. As stated earlier, they have become a concern for law enforcement agencies, which have developed several programs to better address these issues. For example, a document titled *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective* issued by the Critical Incident Response Group, the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime and the Federal Bureau of Investigation is particularly telling of law enforcement's take on this specific issue and will be further discussed in the literature review section. So far, as we have seen, there are strong similarities, between all of these events: young men, after some planning, bring an armed

weapon to school and shoots randomly at their schoolmates or at school staff. It is those similarities between the shooters that have come to constitute a new criminal category: school shooters. Yet while a small body of scholarship has looked into the issue through several analytical lenses and angles, the fact that only young men engage in school shootings is a question that continues to be largely overlooked by scholars and media alike. This is precisely why the following research proposes to look into the social construction of masculinity as a key part of understanding school shootings. On this matter Kimmel and Mahler write:

“All or most of the shooters had tales of being harassed—specifically, gay-baited—for inadequate gender performance; their tales are the tales of boys who did not measure up to the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, in our view, these boys are not psychopathological deviants but rather overconformists to a particular normative construction of masculinity, a construction that defines violence as a legitimate response to a perceived humiliation (Kimmel, Malher:1440:2003)”

This proposition of understanding school shooters as ‘overconformists’ is quite interesting especially since most of the coverage of school shooters has sought to make them look to the contrary quite the contrary: that is, a deviation from the norm. In fact, what Kimmel and Mahler are proposing, is that the dominant norm of masculinity, as it currently stands in North American culture is quite violent. Thus while the shooter might be portrayed as outside of the norm, a deviant, a ‘freak’ or a ‘nerd’, he is in fact conforming to the cultural script of violent masculinity which is arguably the hegemonic form of masculinity in North-America. The portrayal of the shooter by media, however faulty, remains of the utmost importance when examining school shootings. In the article “The Monster Next Door: Media Constructions of Boys and Masculinity” researcher Mia Consalvo writes:

“ (...) There is very little work done examining nonfiction, non-entertainment portrayal of men—especially white men—such as those found in news coverage. This is especially important given that

the criteria for “acceptable” masculinity is likely different in fiction and nonfiction representations of men (Consalvo:29:2003)”

Here Consalvo explains why this current research has sought to look into media portrayals of school shooters. Contrary to previous attempts, such as in the work of Katherine Newman where the cultural script theory to explain school shootings is proposed but unsubstantiated, this research will aim to demonstrate through data the clear presence of a cultural script of school shootings. Most importantly, it will show that this script is particularly gendered.

IV. Literature Review

“The obvious but-hard-to-grasp truth is that living with the media is today one of the main things Americans and many other human beings do”
(Gitlin 2001:5)

In their article *Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982-2001*, masculinity scholars Michael Kimmel and Matthew Mahler write the following about the field of school shooting research:

“(…) these studies have all missed gender. They use such broad terminology as ‘teen violence,’ ‘youth violence,’ ‘gang violence,’ ‘suburban violence,’ and ‘violence in the schools’ as though girls are equal participants in this violence. Conspicuously absent is any mention of just who these youth or teens are who have committed the violence. They pay little or no attention to the obvious fact that all the school shootings were committed by boys – masculinity is the single greatest risk factor in school violence” (Kimmel & Mahler:2011:1442).

This statement, while quite provocative, is on point: a great deal of school shooting research has

not problematized the fact that mostly boys and men are conducting school shootings. However, I disagree with Kimmel and Mahler's argument that masculinity is the greatest risk factor in school violence, and suggest, instead, that the school shooting cultural script is particularly attractive to boys and men because it is bound up with cultural scripts of masculinity. In order to better understand how the school shooting cultural script is readily available for men and boys to adopt, we must further explore the processes by which the script is propagated in our culture. Mainly, it is important to look into how school shootings are portrayed in the media. Media scholar Douglas Kellner writes that in our era of media spectacle, "producing acts of violence and terror is one way to guarantee maximum media coverage and achieve celebrity" (Kellner 89:2008).

School shootings as intensively public and school shooters actively seek that publicity in order to have a platform for their explosion of rage. While the media offers this platform, they are highly uncritical of their place in the school shooting script. From a scholarly perspective; the discourse of masculinity within the concept of the media spectacle remains an important area to be analyzed. Why is it that violence and terror, as Kellner proposes, are behaviors that are mainly reenacted by men and boys? While many have criticized a gendered approach to crime, it is undeniable that even if school shootings are seen as a way to achieve instant fame, this type of fame is clearly gendered.

In order to lay the foundations of such an analysis, the following literature review will explore the research that has focused on school shootings as an object of inquiry. This review of literature has been separated into different sub-themes. The first section, centering on men and criminality, will look into the field of criminology and its research on men and crime. It will demonstrate that very little has been written on the gendered aspect of a specific type of crime: school shootings. In the sub-section, on suicide with hostile intent we will explore the work of forensic psychologist Antonia Preti and the Devotio Complex. In the third part, on bullying and teasing, we will explore the work that has been done on the effect of bullying on incidents of school shootings. Lastly, in the section titled *Young men and Gun*, we will explore the work of Douglas Kellner on masculinity and gun violence, which, he argues, are inextricably linked.

❖ On Young Men and Criminality

*“I was feeling proud, strong, good, and more **respected**. I had accomplished something. I’m not the kind of kid who accomplishes anything. This is the only adventure I’ve ever had”*

Micheal Carneal told the court psychiatrist after going on a rampage in his high-school of West Paducah, December 1997 (Newman 2004:6, emphasis added)

In this first section on young men and criminality, we will briefly look into the fields of criminology and gender studies in order to explore how researchers linked masculinity to criminal behavior. We will see that, while criminology has produced groundbreaking work on masculinity and crime, the social aspect of masculinity when it pertains to crime remains an important area to be further explored ethnographically, especially in the North American cultural context. In his book *The Creation of Dangerous Violent Criminals*, Lonnie Athens advocates for what is essentially ethnographic research of crime and criminals:

“Of course a researcher does not need to have a heart disease in order to discover its nature and cure, but at least see, touch, smell, and examine actual diseased hearts if he ever hopes to know anything about them (...) Thus although one does not have to *be* a violent criminal to discover the cause of others becoming violent criminals, it is only a matter of common sense that extensive direct contact with violent criminals is absolutely essential if one expects ever to achieve this goal” (Athens:1992:20).

In his book, Athens conducted an impressive ethnographic-type study of violent criminals, interviewing in depth 38 individuals for several hours each while they were in prison or jail. In his own words: “(...) I operated upon the third critical assumption that it is far better to study fifty people in depth than to study 5,000 people superficially” (Athens:1992:21). However, in the field of criminology, ethnographic research remains out of the norm. While the relationship between men, crime and masculinity has been extensively discussed in this field, research based on

ethnographic facts is still lacking. The link between masculinity and crime, however, has and continues to be one of the driving forces of criminology research to the extent where criminologists, such as Collier, have proposed this relationship as the main pushing force in current criminology theory (Collier in Jamieson and Evan: 2008). Thus while statistically speaking it is undeniable that men commit the most crimes, they also tend to be the victims of most crimes (Synnott 2009). All data reflect that men and boys perpetrate more of the conventional crimes as well as the more serious crimes than do women and girls (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). However, it is important to point out that research has shown that “particular patterns of aggression were linked with hegemonic masculinity, not as a mechanical effect for which hegemonic masculinity was a cause, but through the pursuit of hegemony” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:834). This clearly shows that it is not masculinity itself that is at cause when discussing crime but rather the construction of violent and criminal hegemonic form of masculinity, which prevails in North American culture.

This also shows that there is an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity that involves crime. However, the link between masculinity and crime must be more fully analyzed in ethnographic terms. Indeed, in an everyday life setting, how is hegemonic masculinity performed? How is it perceived and challenged? Most importantly, can school shootings be said to be a direct pursuit of hegemonic masculinity: are school shooters, unable to conform to hegemonic masculinity, rebelling through its most violent form when they decided to plan and commit their rampage? Through a media analysis, can we see the propagation of a discourse of hegemonic masculinity through the coverage of criminal events, such as school shootings? These are all questions explored by this research but that yet remain to be answered in more depth.

As Messerschmidt proposes:

“Crime by men is not simply an extension of the ‘male sex role’. Rather, crime by men is a form of *social practice* invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing identity” (Messerschmidt in Jamieson & Evans 2008:160, emphasis added).

Again, this raises several interesting questions in terms of school shootings: how were the shooters ‘performing masculinity’ through their rampage? What is the culturally salient discourse of masculinity that made these events possible and meaningful in the first place? Were the shooters themselves aware of how their actions were bound up with the pursuit of a particular kind of gendered identity?

As discussed earlier in her book *Rampage*, social anthropologist Katherine Newman is perhaps one of the first scholars to touch on the importance of masculinity in the cultural script of school shootings. She bases her analysis on the two school shootings she has explored in West Paducah, Kentucky and Pearl, Mississippi. She presents a range of statistics in terms of crime and rampage shootings. She writes:

“Some characteristics of mass murders resemble rampage school shootings. For example, compared with single-victim murders, a larger proportion of mass murders occur in small towns or rural areas (43.3 percent compared with 24.1 percent). Mass murderers are also predominantly white (62.9 percent) and male (94.4 percent), and slightly over 40 percent of such crimes are committed by young adults, aged twenty to twenty-nine” (Newman 2004:57).

Thus, the gendered aspect of crime seems to be the most statistically accurate prediction to mass shootings as an overwhelmingly majority, 94.4%, of mass murder perpetrators are men (Newman 2004). Newman’s data suggest that there is a performance of masculinity at play here. However, while this majority is acknowledged, very few studies have looked into how exactly masculinity is felt (by the shooters) to be achieved and achieved through mass murder. Clearly then, more research needs to be done on how rampage shooters perceive themselves as men, in a social sense.

If most media have overlooked gender in their coverage of school shooting, some articles have

discussed it directly. In an article entitled “Deadly Dreams: What Motivates School Shootings” published by *Scientific American*, the author writes:

“The vast majority of the perpetrators are male; by our count, females instigated only four of the 101 school shootings that have occurred worldwide since 1974 (Robert Frank, *Scientific American*, July 30th, 2012)”.

Preliminary research shows that, as regards school shootings in the United States and Canada, all perpetrators were young men. Thus, as aforementioned, there is an important area that remains unspoken of in terms of North American hegemonic masculinity as it pertains to school shootings (Preti 2008). Additionally, while many sources recognize that the shooters might have had a strong desire to cause fear, there is no exploration into why mass murder seems to have been perceived by the shooters as the ideal way to cause that fear. What are the connections between fear and masculinity? While some, like Kellner, have pointed to the fame associated with school shooters, little has been said about how that kind of fame is associated with masculinity. Anthropologist Claudia Strauss maintains that school shooters have traditionally enjoyed a kind of fame that, unlike other murderers and criminals, is not associated with blame. In her article “Blaming for Columbine,” Strauss argues that, in popular media, school shooters are mostly represented as victims of cultural forces that are beyond their control. These cultural forces include anything from violent video games to the removal of the mandatory prayer in schools (Strauss 2007). This connection between blame and fame as it relates to criminal men is highly interesting, as it raises the question of why certain types of murderers seem to enjoy more fame and glory than others. There is still a gap to be filled in the research on masculinity as it pertains to this specific area.

These important questions, Athens believe, can be explored by looking at men and criminal behavior through an analysis of their social experiences. He writes:

“The key [to discovering what creates violent criminals] (...) will not come through developing theories from studying the social

environments of dangerous violent criminals, nor from studying their biophysiological make-ups. The key will also not come through the study of their social environment in conjunction with their bio-physiological makeup, as some have done under the erroneous belief that this constituted a major theoretical breakthrough. Instead, the key to the discovery of the creation of dangerous violent criminals lies in the developing theories from the careful study of their social *experiences*” (Athens:17:1989, emphasis added).

While we could embark here on a never ending anthropological debate about what shapes the nature of social experiences. However, it is important to point out that this process is believed to occur in a complicated feedback loop, with the implication that culture is never static and always changing (Amit 2002). More ethnographic-type research should be conducted in schools to uncover how social experiences of gender norms, mainly masculinity culture, influences or legitimates criminal behavior in students.

❖ Comparing School Shootings with Mass Shootings

On the differences between mass shootings and school shootings, Newman writes:

“Some characteristics of mass murders resemble rampage school shootings. For example, compared with single-victim murders, a larger proportion of mass murders occur in small towns or rural areas (43.4 percent compared with 24.1 percent). Mass murderers are also predominantly white (62.2 percent) and male (94.4 percent), and slightly over 40 percent of such crimes are committed by young adults, aged twenty to twenty-nine” (Newman:57:2004)

Furthermore, Newman proposes that there are two key similarities between school shootings and workplace shootings. First, both school shooters and workplace shooters tend to usually target

the institution rather than specific individuals. Second, they are usually the victims of marginalization within this institution. In these statistics proposed by Newman, it is also interesting to note that mass shootings are predominately committed by white men. While the statistics are abundant regarding other aspects of mass murders, race does not seem to be included in most mass shootings statistics. For example, the FBI offers the following statistic regarding mass shootings in 2012:

“The average active shooter incident lasts 12 minutes, while 37 percent last less than five minutes. 49 percent of attackers committed suicide, 34 percent were arrested, and 17 percent were killed. 51 percent of the attacks studied occurred in the workplace, while 17 percent occurred in a school, 17 percent occurred in a public place, and six percent occurred in a religious establishment.”
(John Nicoletti, F.B.I. website – Active Shooter Statistics)

In the cases of the school shootings presented in this research, it was hard to establish a correlation between race and school shootings since the information on that matter was unavailable. This, however, is fertile ground for further research. Indeed, are school shootings a cultural script that caters mostly to white men? Do script vary according to race? It is also important to problematize the fact that race is often overlooked in statistics regarding mass shooting especially since it is often included in other types of violent crimes such as, for example, gang and drug related crimes.

❖ On Suicide with Hostile Intent

Forensic psychology has long recognized a specific pattern, which may be applied to school shootings, usually referred to as *suicide with hostile intent*. In his article “School Shooting as a Culturally Enforced Way of Expressing Suicidal Hostile Intentions,” psychiatrist Antonio Preti explores how school shootings might fall under this category. Preti offers a unique approach to the issue by analyzing school shootings as cultural phenomena directly linked to the ancient Greek and Hebrew *devotio* cultural complex. The *devotio* complex refers to an ancient practice wherein a young man feeling wronged would kill himself in a public place to express his discontent. [Consider, for example, the young man who immolated himself in Tunisia and

ignited the Arab spring (Frank Gardner, *BBC Online*, December 2011)]. Interestingly enough, Preti always uses ‘he’ when referring to the suicidal individual but never addresses the obviously gendered aspect of suicide with hostile intent. While using outdated anthropological terms, Preti writes:

“The ethnographic literature reports that suicide for revenge is widespread in pre-industrial cultures, as it was described among the Zaire in Africa, the Aguaruna Jivaro in Peru, and among the Fore, the Hagen, The Maenge, the Maring, and the Gainj of Papua New Guinea. In these locations, popular narratives such as myths, legends, and folktales report explicit rules to accomplish suicide for revenge with a good chance of punishing the offender” (Preti:2008:547).

Preti then describes how the suicidal individual would follow cultural norms about how to proceed with the appropriate steps. He would first warn his family members of his intentions by telling them who was responsible for his humiliation. After committing the suicide publicly, he would have good reasons to expect his family members or kin group to avenge his death by retaliating to the person he had identified as responsible for his suicide.

Preti makes an important link when he compares the *devotio* complex to recent school shootings. He points to the shooter’s recorded messages, which were and continue to be disseminated through the Internet. In these messages, more often than not, the shooter clearly indicates his desire for revenge and identifies the targets.

❖ On Bullying and Teasing

“Everyone is making fun of me because of how I look, how fucking weak I am, and shit, well I will get you all back, ultimate fucking revenge here”

Quote from Eric Harris, one of the perpetrators of the Columbine School Shooting, from his personal diary (Nye, James, *The Daily Mail UK*, July 29th, 2013, emphasis added).

Perhaps one of the most cited causes of school shootings as proposed by the media is social rejection. In their article “Teasing, Rejection, and Violence: Case Studies of the School Shootings,” psychiatrists Mark R. Leary and al. have addressed this claim through a meticulous study of all “well-documented cases of school violence in the United States from January, 1995 to March, 2001 (Leary and al. 2003:204)”. They write:

“Psychological theory and research support the speculation that social rejection may be associated with aggression. Several studies of children have documented a relationship between peer rejection and aggressive behavior” (Leary et al. 2003: 203).

Beginning with the Loukaitis case, as I do, they enumerate the claims of social rejection in each incident. For example, they write:

“Moses Lake, WA (2/2/96). Barry Loukaitis, age 14, used a .30 caliber rifle to kill a teacher and two boys, and injure one girl. He was reportedly severely depressed at the time and was described as having an inferiority complex. He had been teased by one of the victims, who was an athlete” (Leary and al. 2003: 206).

They also write about Golden and Johnson:

“Andrew Golden, 11, and Mitchell Johnson, 13, opened fire with handguns and rifles on Westside Middle School, killing 5 people and injuring 11 others. Johnson, clearly the leader in the episode, was allegedly angry about being rejected by a girl, telling friends that he “had a lot of killing to do.” He had also been repeatedly teased for being fat. He also bragged about using drugs and killing animals, allegedly had attempted suicide, and had been accused of molesting a 2-year-old girl. His parents were distant, often calling the police

looking for their son. Golden came from a supportive family but, like Johnson, had also been rejected by a girlfriend. He was described as tough and mean-spirited” (Leary and al. 2003: 206).

Surprisingly, they include in their case study the incident of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, during which, in 2001, Catherine Bush brought a gun to school and shot a cheerleader who reportedly teased her. I would categorize this incident as an attempted murder rather than as a school shooting as Bush only shot one student as a result of repetitive teasing at the hands of that specific student. She did not shoot at the crowd at random but aimed and fired a single shot. As Leary et al. are attempting to look into teasing as a leading cause for school shootings, the Williamsport incident first appears as a textbook example for retaliation shooting. However, this incident is misleading because it doesn't *adhere* to the essential definition of school shooting: that the shooter or shooters are aiming at random individuals for what they represent to him/them symbolically, not at a specific individual as retaliation for a perceived or real aggression. I argue that school shootings are only perpetrated by boys in part because of what mass shootings have come to represent *symbolically* in our popular culture: a way of pursuing and achieving hegemonic masculinity. It is thus very important to distinguish between student-to-student quarrels, even if sometimes deadly, and school shootings. We must also point out that Leary and al. fail to acknowledge that, in all of their case studies, apart from the Williamsport incident, young boys are the perpetrators. If we consider their proposition to view school shooting as retaliation shootings, we are still left wondering why boys are more susceptible than girls to retaliate lethally for perceived social rejection, as the researchers never specifically address this gender difference in their findings.

❖ On Young Men and Gun Culture

“More guns is better. You have more *power*. You look better if you have a lot of guns. A kid would say one gun is good, but Michael had a lot of guns”

Micheal Carneal told the court psychiatrist after going on a rampage in his high-school of West Paducah, December 1997 (Newman:2004:6, emphasis added)

On the subject of young men and school shootings in scholarly analysis, Muschert writes that the limited scholarship that has emerged from the discussion on school shooting is so disparate in terms of focus that “instead of contributing to a broad, multidisciplinary perspective on school shootings as a social problem, such a disjuncture among scholars means little in the way of unified scholarship” (Muschert:2007:62). However, as we will later see, some researchers, as Kellner have tried to use a multidisciplinary approach to discussing school shooting. In his book *Guys and Guns Amok*, Kellner makes use of both criminology and media study theories. Furthermore, he is among one of the first scholar to really explores in-depth the North American gun culture as it pertains to masculinity and mass shootings. Through his analysis of several domestic type of terrorism, including the Virginia tech massacre, he explores how masculinity is achieved through murderous gunplay. He writes:

“There was little discussion of how male socialization and its imbrication with gun culture was involved in the shooting, nor was there discussion of male rage or violent male identity construction. While there was speculation about the two teen shooters’ family lives, there was little initial discussion of how middle-class parents could allow their teenage boys to have such a deadly arsenal, apparently in plain view, in their homes (Kellner:2008:121)”

By combining masculinity theory and Athens’s theory of criminalization, Kellner proposes that the Columbine pair, through a dangerous cocktail of male rage, the need to assert masculine identity, immersion in violent video games, and an omnipresent gun culture, came to be totally *desensitized* to the suffering of others, creating the ideal psychological precondition for killing. This assumption, based on a multiple factor approach, is highly innovative considering that most scholarly research on school shootings has either focused solely on individual psychopathy (Preti, 2008; Mullen, 2000; Langman, 2010, Larkin 2009) or on social factors (Newman, 2004) while excluding the gendered aspects in both approaches. Here Kellner proposes a hybrid theory of both through the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity. What remains to be fully explored is how this assumption holds to the test when compared to other school shooters, such as Kimveer Gill.

As Kellner speaks of a hypermasculinity and an omnipresent gun culture that is traditionally American, how can we transplant his proposition to a Quebecois context? In other words, is hegemonic masculinity and hyper-masculinity a typical North American phenomenon? From a 'global village' perspective, has this culture of violent games and guns travelled to and gained prominence in Quebec, or was it always part of masculinity culture in Western culture? These questions remain unanswered since there is yet to be research conducted on this matter in a Canadian and Québécois context. Thus, for example, while Kellner makes several references to the right-wing gun culture in the United States, which, he proposes, played an integral part in the militarized culture that the Columbine shooters immersed themselves in, how can this culture relate to the Quebecois context? There is indeed a wide gap in the literature of Canadian masculinity and a complete non-existence of a discussion of a hegemonic Quebecois masculinity. Furthermore, while there is a small but growing literature in terms of masculinity and gun culture, there is still a great need of ethnographic research in these issues in both the Canadian and American contexts.

Chapter II

Conceptual Framework & Methodology

This research borrows from several fields of study and different yet complementary theoretical backgrounds. The following is a short but complete presentation of the different concepts and terminology used in this research as well as the different fields from which they originated. It will briefly discuss the fields of criminal anthropology and media anthropology, as well as the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is central to this study. Finally, it will also discuss the methodology of media ethnography, which was used to analyze the data that will be further presented in chapter three.

❖ Criminal Anthropology

Early anthropologists' interest in studying crime can be retraced to the birth of anthropology. More specifically, this interest dates back to the 19th century and is attributed to the Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and his now famous work on criminals (Gibson & Rafter 2004). Research of this sort gave rise to the small but growing subfield of cultural criminology, which eventually became a discipline in its own right (Ferrell 1998). Among anthropologists, however, Lombroso's work was ultimately set aside when social evolutionary theories became increasingly discredited. His techniques involved, among other things, measuring cranial circumference as well as considering hair and skin color as indicators of criminal intent. While Lombroso's methodologies were misguided, his interest in discovering why and how criminal behavior occur spread, and many followed him in this inquiry.

For example, we are told in a recent issue of the *Annual Review of Anthropology* - which includes an overview of the anthropology of crime and criminalization (Schneider & Schneider,

2008, pp. 351-73) – that:

“Lombroso’s scientific study of the ‘body, mind and habits’ of the ‘born’ criminal rested on the premise, familiar to early evolutionary anthropologists, that crime among the ‘civilized races’ was an ‘atavistic’ throwback to ‘savage custom’” (Schneider & Scheinder: 2008: 354).

Some of Lombroso’s critics included anthropologist Franz Boas, who is now widely considered to be the father of American anthropology. Taking somewhat of radical theoretical stance for the time, Boas famously wrote in the preface of his book *The Primitive Man*: “There is no fundamental difference in the ways of thinking of primitive and civilized man. A close connection between race and personality has never been established” (Boas:1938:v). Thus Boas set a new trajectory for contemporary anthropologists, urging them to look away from evolutionary theories and rather look at world cultures in a systematic fashion.

Then, in the 1950s, following its first encounter with crime through Lombroso’s work, anthropology retracted into the study of smaller scale societies. In these small societies, were are told, deviance “had a moral rather than legal status, and violators of norms were shamed, ridiculed, held up for retribution, or punished as witches or sorcerers” (Scheinder & Scheinder 2008:354). These ways of performing justice seemed, to the early anthropologists, to be an “archaic inheritance from the past, destined to be superseded by modern criminal jurisprudence” (Scheinder & Scheinder 2008:354)

In the 1960s, following what many call the “post-modern turn,” there seems to have developed a renewed interest in the anthropology of crime, especially as it pertains to urban youth. In North America, for instance, the Chicago School of Human Ecology contributed many ethnographic-type studies on mainly poor and drug-ridden neighborhoods (e.g. Waquant, 1997). At present, the field of the anthropology of crime has two main driving currents, one that focuses on the anthropology of the criminalization process and another that focuses on the ethnographic analysis of ‘criminal organizations’ including, but not limited to, street gangs and mafias. This

type of research, while inscribed in the framework of criminal anthropology - that is, it treats criminal activity as a cultural phenomenon and thus moves away from biological explanations of crime - also borrows from media anthropology to look into representations of crime and criminals.

❖ Critical Masculinity Studies

In their article *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, gender scholars Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmitt retrace the history and application of the controversial concept of hegemonic masculinity. They first write that at the beginning of its theoretical conception in the 1970s, hegemonic masculinity was seen as a set of practices that allowed men's dominance over women to continue. Hegemonic masculinity was thus differentiated from other masculinities, such as subordinate masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is not seen as *normal* masculinity but is certainly conceptualized as *normative* masculinity. Its dominance is not necessarily violent, although it can, and often does, take that physical form. Hegemonic masculinity is thus conceptualized as a type of cultural dominance, which is why it has borrowed the controversial term 'hegemonic' from political theory. The hegemonic aspect of masculinity dictates, for example, that men should enjoy popularity and admiration of both men and women; that they should have successful relationships with women; and most importantly the respect and fear of others. Other qualities include aggressiveness, strength, drive, and ambition (Pascoe 2007). Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity often rests on a repudiation of all that is culturally associated with the feminine such as softness, vulnerability and emotions (Branon, 1976). It goes without saying that the definition of hegemonic masculinity, like any social construct, will vary through time and across culture.

As we already know, the practices that constitute hegemonic masculinity are subject to historical and social context, thus they change over time. The early formulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity included the possibility "that a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man might become hegemonic, as part of a process leading toward an abolition of gender hierarchies" (Messerschmidt & Connell 2005:833). Thus from the mid-80s to the early 2000s, the concept of hegemonic masculinity passed from a "conceptual model with a fairly narrow empirical base to a widely used framework for research and debates about men and masculinity"

(Messerschmidt & Connell 2005: 835).

As any new theoretical framework, the concept of hegemonic masculinity was severely criticized. The first and main critique may be qualified as an attempt to render hegemonic masculinity as a theory grounded in gender essentialism, fundamentally flawed because of its stereotypical rendering of the character of men and its imposition of a false unity on a fluid and contradictory reality. To this critic, Messerschmitt and Connell point out that the addition of peripheral masculinities to the concept counters the potential essentialism. Indeed, they propose that while hegemonic masculinity represents an idealized or normative masculinity, masculinity scholars do recognize the presence of a number of divergent masculinities. The concept has also been criticized because it rests on the assumption of male-female binary, and ignores difference and exclusion *within* gender categories. Messerschmitt and Connell address this specific critic by writing that the proposition that hegemonic masculinity essentializes or homogenizes is quite difficult to reconcile with the tremendous multiplicity of social constructions that have been brought forward by ethnographers and many others who have been able to examine and analyze these within the hegemonic masculinity framework.

Lastly, sociologist Anthony Synnott offers an important critic to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In his book “Re-Thinking Men” he writes that Connell clearly demonstrate how the concept is oppressive to women however it overlooks how hegemonic masculinity is as devastating to men. Indeed, in the context of school shootings, it is easy to see how school shooters are also the victims of their crime either through suicide after the rampage or, in rare cases, by spending the rest of their lives in incarceration. This is an aspect that has never before been approached or discussed by both scholars of school shootings and the media. Synnott further writes:

“Implying that men are only villains, and villains are only male is just silly and wrong -- to put this very simply and very obviously. We should be beyond such simplistic moralistic theorizing of men/bad and women/good-but-victimized. Connell and Kimmel are not the only ones standing for social justice and gender quality – most men do.”

(Synnott: 2009:15)

Precisely; this research is not proposing that masculinity is at fault in school shootings incidents but rather that the practices of hegemonic masculinity are intrinsic to understanding the events and analyzing the media covering these incidents. Finally, my research maintains that, as Messerschmitt proposes in his work on masculinity and crime, it is not hegemonic masculinity that causes crime but rather the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity that is involved in motivating school shootings.

❖ Media Anthropology

As media anthropologist Elizabeth Bird reminds us, in a so-called ‘media saturated culture’ it is undeniable that tragedies and scandals attract a wide range of audiences, which in turn create opportunities for public debate on specific subjects (Bird 2003). These debates, emerging from both the media representations themselves as well as from their audiences, are important in understanding how cultural groups accept, challenge, and/or perpetuate the media’s interpretations of particular events. By examining how the media construct news stories and how its audience receives them, we gain a valuable understanding of what Bird calls ‘public opinion’ on a wide variety of subjects. As Bird proposes, through ethnographic research of audiences, we gain greater insight into how media representations both reflect and resist prevailing culturally salient views (Bird 2003). In the case of recent school shootings, a media-based analysis combined with an ethnographic study of the audience has yet to be undertaken. In addition, media coverage is a vital area of inquiry in this context as it appears to have played an important role in what has come to be known in mainstream media as the ‘Columbine Effect,’ which inspires individuals to re-enact the same sort of actions presented therein, or, more specifically in this case, the same sort of massacre.

In school shooting literature, some have proposed that a more accurate understanding of these ‘copycat’ incidents would be through what is called in the psychological literature ‘the Werther effect’. The Werther effect refers to the imitation of suicide after seeing someone else commit suicide (Preti 2008, Schmidtke & Hafner 1988). There has been much media research on the effect of films and publicity depicting suicides (Phillips & Carstensen 1986, L. E. Davidson and

al. 1989, Stack 2005). For example, the Finland Ministry of Justice went so far as to propose a guideline for media covering school shooting stories with the explicit goal of diminishing the Werther effect (Justice Ministry 2009). North American news agencies, however, do not abide by any official guidelines when it comes to televising school shooting incidents. As exemplified by the recent Sandy Hook tragedy, coverage of recent school shooting is often continuous, and receives an incredible amount of media attention.

It is fair to say that recent school shooters are well aware of this extensive mediatization, which is no doubt why they make their statement publicly through violence. Tellingly, Barry Loutaikis allegedly told one of the friends who testified at his trial that he ‘wanted to be known as a killer’ (*Ellensburg Daily Record* September 4th, 1997-p4). Other school shooters made similar statements. Kimveer Gill, for instance, wrote on his webpage, referring to himself in the third person, “You will know him as the Angel of Death” (*CBC News Online*, September 14th, 2006).

When one analyzes these types of statements, it becomes clear that an important aspect of the discussion is implied but silenced: the cultural aspect of masculinity as it pertains to criminal violence. On this silenced aspect, gender scholar Mia Consalvo writes that the media “emphasized certain factors and ignored others, and so functioned to let systems such as hegemonic masculinity and school culture mostly off the hook” (Consalvo 28:2003).

While Newman proposes the cultural script of school shooting as one of the factors contributing to these incidents, she never discusses the role of the media in the creation and propagation of this cultural script. Consalvo, who has studied the media coverage of school shootings, concludes:

“When examining the media reporting of the Columbine High School Massacre, one notes how the issue of masculinity was withdrawn from scrutiny leaving the media with no way of representing the shooters except as ‘monsters’” (Consalvo 2003:834-835).

She goes on to explain that the term ‘monsters’ is conveniently gender-less. By labeling school

shooters as monsters, we refrain from discussing them as young men and we do not have to make sense of their motives or how they have been shaped by their societies. In chapter four of this research, we will look more closely into how the media portrayals of school shootings and school shooters have contributed to the creation of the script dictating school shootings. We will see how media coverage usually takes a deep look into the personal lives of the school shooters and their parents but rarely into the culture of masculinity as it stands in North America. Thus the dominant cultural model of what is acceptable to display in terms of gender identity, perhaps mostly learned and reinforced during high school years, is never called into question. In fact, if we go back to King's characterization of high school as a trial of manhood, we may better understand why school shooters commit their rampages on what can be understood as the *ground zero* of their gender socialization.

Through an analysis of chosen media coverage, this research has investigated how and why the media discourse on these events has so successfully left the discourse of masculinity out of the discussion when it is, as I will show, so profoundly relevant in and to the lives of school shooters. Analysis of the media coverage of such events reveals how a certain kind of dominant and hegemonic masculinity is favored over other, more subordinate, masculinities. In other words, we will consider how the media, through the coverage of school shooters, convey a culturally appropriate way of 'being a man' vs. its vilification of inappropriate ways of 'being a man.'

❖ Media Ethnography

"Ethnography no longer claims to describe a reality accessible by anyone using the right methods, independent of the historical or cultural context of the act of describing.

On the other hand, there is no justification for complete relativism.

There is a human group out there who lived in a world before the ethnographer appeared and who will continue to do so after he or she leaves"

(Agar in Bird, 19:2003).

There have been many debates within anthropology as to the legitimacy of media ethnography. Anthropologist Elizabeth Bird addresses those debates by pointing out the important place news

media play in western society. She writes that news media have come to fulfill the role of storyteller in our everyday lives. Indeed, there have been many allusions to journalists as modern day scribes. The way in which news is constructed to fit stereotypical frameworks is an important area to explore if we are to understand any media rendering of a news story. However, as pointed out by Bird, “a neglected area has been an exploration of how news narratives interrelate with the stories and concerns of the wider culture at specific moments in time” (Bird:151:2003).

In terms of school shootings, how does the media rendering of the ‘story’ fit stereotypical and culturally salient narratives on masculinity and violence? She writes that “to become a real scandal, the media accounts must spark the imagination of the public” (Bird:31:2003). Thus school shootings have undeniably resonated with current culturally salient views in the audience, as they have become massive media spectacles. Using Bird’s proposition we can reasonably argue that if school shootings were not salient to a wider cultural discourse, they would not attract this wide public attention. In other words, scandals are not ‘made’ or ‘created’ but rather they are born: the school shooting cultural script was born because it gained salience with the public.

Furthermore, Bird writes that stories that become scandals usually do so because they challenge an established discourse on morality. Some scandals can successfully transcend the media and penetrate individual consciousness through every day interactions. This can happen when people hear about a particular event or scandal without the direct involvement of the media, for example, when one hears a news story from a neighbor who heard it on the radio. Here Bird identifies an important process whereby a news story circulates outside of the media. She writes that “the narratives must speak to issues or emotions that engage readers and viewers in speculation, fascination, and downright relish in the melodramatic excess of it all” (Bird 2003:47).

Most importantly and perhaps not as clearly voiced by Bird is that media coverage of events is *framed* in ways that will resonate with the audience. This process is not necessarily an active one, but one that takes place spontaneously in any retelling of an event. We tailor all stories to fit the interlocutor we relate the story to. Complete objectivity, as we know, is not possible. Thus

school shooting news stories in the media are fashioned and rendered in a way they will resonate with and ignite the public. This proposition by Bird is similar to Kellner's concept of 'infotainment' (the proposition that the primary goal of news media is to entertainment rather than inform) but differs in that it takes into greater consideration the role of individual agency both in terms of the public but also as it regards the journalists who write these stories.

❖ Research Objectives & Methodology

This research first aims to present, as proposed by Newman, school shootings in terms of the cultural script they have become. In order to reach this goal, I have carefully analyzed and categorized 46 media items covering 15 school shootings occurring from 1996 to 2006. These news coverage stories have been analyzed with the intent of revealing how media coverage of early school shootings has influenced coverage of later school shootings, thus demonstrating the creation of a continuous script. This analysis, which identifies the key themes operating in and through the extensive media coverage, is the first of its kind in school shooting research and offers an unprecedented and systematic look into how the cultural script of school shooting evolved over the incidents studied. Secondly, this research proposes that the cultural script of school shooting is one that is inextricably linked to the dominant norms of masculinity in North America. These norms are best understood through the concept of hegemonic masculinity as previously defined.

Through this thematic analysis, this research was able to identify three recurrent narrative strategies that are used to describe a school shooter: 1) Social exclusion; 2) difficult relationships with women; and 3) being a victim of bullying. These three narrative strategies are in complete contradiction with the portrayal of hegemonic masculinity, which would dictate that an ideal man should enjoy 1) popularity and admiration; 2) successful relationships with women; and 3) the respect and fear of others. This research hypothesizes that young men who find themselves in a situation of perceived total gender failure with regards to these three narrative strategies see the planning and execution of a school shooting as the ultimate masculine exit because it provides them with this very script. As proposed by Connell, these young men are not on the social fringe

but rather they are overconformists to the culture of hegemonic masculinity.

The second part of this research is dedicated to the Dawson school shooting on which no scholarly attention has so far been focused. This section includes the results gleaned from eight key interviews conducted with eyewitnesses of the shooting: former Dawson students and employees as well as with law enforcement officials. These interviews are the first of their kind to be presented in a scholarly research on the Dawson shooting, they offer a unique portrait of the event. This portrait is a mix of several narratives and thus offers a more complete representation of the incident as it stems from different vantage points. Then, using the three proposed norms, this research goes on to hypothesize that Kimveer Gill, like other school shooters before and after him, felt a crushing failure with regards to his attempts to establish himself into what he perceived to be an appropriate masculine persona. This, I argue, led him to plan and execute a school shooting, following the cultural script he had encountered through the media and what he saw as a more successful gender persona: his very own masculine exit.

❖ Data Collection

For the first part of this research, the thematic analysis, 46 media items were chosen according to the following factors: 1) They covered school shootings events which occurred from 1996 to 2006; 2) They used the term ‘school-shooting’ to discuss the event and made a connection between the event covered and previous school shootings. After these first two criteria, the data sample was still much too dense for the time span of this research. Thus, within the thousands of articles responding to the first two criteria, I have randomly chosen 46 items that seemed to be produced by arguably the most popular and distributed media platforms (ex: NY times, LA Times, People Magazine, Dateline NBC etc). Since the goal is to attempt to retrace the cultural script and its salience in our culture, it is important to choose media materials that were widely popular and distributed.

In the second part of this research, informal and unstructured interviews were conducted with

eight participants. Seven interviews were conducted in person and one interview was conducted over the phone. All interviews were recorded and the excerpts in the thesis are verbatim. The participants were contacted through word-of-mouth and some, directly by email. Some participants were from my own entourage and decided to willingly contact old schoolmate to ask if they would be interested in participating in this research. It is hard to know exactly how many people were contacted in this word-of-mouth fashion. The individuals interested in participating in this research then contacted me through email or phone number. In terms of directly contacting interviewees through email, I have contacted the *Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (S.P.V.M.)* as well as social services (D.P.J.) in order to see who would be willing to discuss with me on the subject. I was directed to two individuals that I then contacted by email. Among the eight individuals who were interviewed for this research there were: one respondent who did not witness the shooting but who was in another Cegep at the time and who had several anxiety disorders as a direct impact from the event. Five respondents who were present at Dawson on the day of the shooting and witness several events directly linked with the incident. One respondent is a social worker and is currently part of a committee to reduce school violence in Montreal. One respondent is a detective at the *Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal* and is currently responsible for creating a prevention program aimed at reducing the incidence of school shootings in Montreal. All interviewees signed a consent form detailing the nature of the research.

- **Limitations**

For the thematic analysis part of this thesis, there are some obvious limitations: the time constraint of this research made it impossible to review all of the available data. Therefore, the thematic analysis is constrained to a limited data sample. However, it is important to point out that the sample is representative of the overall data available since these media items here chosen at random provided that they met the criteria cited in the data collection section and that they were from popular news platform.

In the second part of the research, there are also some limitations. Firstly, the number of

interviews, again because of the time constraint, is relatively small. Furthermore, the interview process was sometimes difficult as some interviewees were understandingly emotional during their retelling of the events and thus preferred to omit certain details of the event (such as the memory of being shot or shot at) during their interviews. Respecting their privacy, I did not push for more details when the participants became too emotional or upset during the interviews. Nonetheless, I believe that the interviews provide an important human aspect to the Dawson tragedy as well as giving us a multiple perspective of the event.

Finally, the data that was collected on Kimveer Gill is admittedly limited. Since Gill is deceased, I had to rely on different types of information in order to be able to speculate about his state of mind at the time of the shooting. While I was able to retrieve part of his online diary (the last two years), there are still a lot of unanswered questions. I have not attempted to reach his family or friends for interviews partly because of the time constraint but also because they have not been present in the media following the event which led me to believe that they might be uncomfortable to participate to this research or reluctant to revisit this traumatic period of their past. However, through my access to the coroner's report on the event as well as through my lengthy interview with detective Arruda, I was able to uncover many facts about Gill that were never made public and that shade an unprecedented light on the event and on his state of mind at the time of the shooting.

Chapter III

Exploring the Masculine Exit

i. Chronology of School Shootings in the USA and Canada

As aforementioned, anthropologist Karen Newman suggests that school shootings are cultural scripts. She argues that they represent readily available scenarios, which seem to mostly resonate with young men who perceive themselves to be in a ‘dead end’ and who actively seek a masculine exit. More precisely, Newman writes on the feasibility of researching the cultural script as one of the defining factors of school shootings:

“How powerful is the notion of cultural scripts in accounting for school shooting? It is the hardest element to ‘test,’ because a shooter’s thought process and motivation are difficult to recover. Shooters either land in jail, where they are often inaccessible or kill themselves. Given the nature of the available data, variables as measurable as mental illness or marginality are hard to construct for cultural scripts. Nonetheless, qualitative accounts in the news coverage point towards a set of blueprints that lead boys in the direction of escalating violence” (Newman:2004:246).

While it is true that the shooter’s thought process is difficult to recover, Newman fails to mention the depth of material that school shooters usually leave behind. Indeed, we can argue that part of the school shooting cultural script is to leave behind video blogs, pictures, manifestos and personal websites in which the shooter describes, among other things, the motivations behind his actions. More research needs to be conducted on this material. For now, however, let

us explore more closely what Newman means when she brings up the concept of cultural scripts with regards to school shootings.

In her book, Newman proposes five factors “that are necessary but not sufficient conditions for rampage school shooting” (Newman:2004:229). Based on the two case studies she explores — the shooting at Heath High School on December 1st 1997 perpetrated by Michael Carneal and the shooting at Jonesboro Middle School on March 24th 1998 perpetrated by Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden — Newman identifies the following key factors: 1. Marginality: the shooter feels a sense of marginality, he might have been bullied or teased; 2. Individual Vulnerabilities: the shooter has personal and/or psychological vulnerabilities that magnify the impact of his marginalization; 3. Cultural Scripts: the shooter is exposed to a cultural script that dictates school shooting as a viable option in reestablishing his social position or one which provides him with a masculine escape; 4. Under The Radar: the shooter is most likely unknown to school officials or police authorities. He is usually low-key and unremarkable; 5. Access To guns: the shooter has an easy access to gun and/or is part of a family/community culture where guns are present and viewed positively.

While Newman’s factors are indeed key in most cases of school shooting, the current research argues that far from being one among many factors, cultural scripts are, in fact, *central* to the occurrence of school shootings. Without the existence of a cultural script, while other types of school violence would surely exist, there would be no school shootings. Comparatively, marginality and individual vulnerabilities are factors that attract individuals to this particular cultural script, and easy access to guns is what makes the script possible: it is the last step in a long planning. While being under the radar is an interesting factor, the current research argues that it is precisely because these young men were unremarkable that the cultural script of school shooting became so enticing to them. Wanting to go out in a blaze, school shooters see this cultural script as way to step out of the shadows. Finally, as Newman writes, school shooters, while being under the radar of authorities, usually share their plans with friends or on online forums, as was the case with Kimveer Gill who attacked Dawson College on September 13th.

Since as we cannot control the existence of the cultural script, this research argues that the only

immediate method of prevention lies in the establishment of a set of standardized procedures in schools and by school officials in association with law enforcement. In the long term however, a more successful way to reduce and eventually stop the occurrences of school shootings would be through programs girded to increase awareness in both youth and school staff of the devastating effect of toxic gender norms.

In their article “Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence”, Kimmel and Mahler propose that the prevention of school shooting can only come from the analysis of the gender discourse that is intrinsic to these incidents:

“In addition to taking gender seriously, a reasoned approach to understanding school shootings must focus not on the form of the shootings—not on questions of family history, psychological pathologies, or broad-based cultural explanations (violence in the media, proliferation of guns) but on the content of the shootings—the stories and narratives that accompany the violence, the relationships and interactions among students, and local school and gender cultures. Using such an approach to interpret the various events that led up to each of the shootings, we find that a striking similarity emerges between the various cases. All or most of the shooters had tales of being harassed—specifically, gay-baited—for inadequate gender performance; their tales are the tales of boys who did not measure up to the norms of hegemonic masculinity”
(Kimmel & Mahler: 115: 2004)

This is precisely what this current research is proposing. For the moment and with this in mind, we will now explore the school shooting events that took place from 1996 leading up to the Dawson School shooting in 2006, which is central to this research. The following table begins with the Frontier Middle School shooting as its emblematic ‘first incident,’ considering that, as the first nationally broadcasted school shooting, it was the only previous incident that could have influenced further school shooters. As Loren Coleman writes in her article “The Copycat effect”:

“The Loukaitis shootings reverberated in Moses Lake for some time and became the national model for future school rampages. Six months after the incident, a local 14-year-old broke into a home, yelled the name Loukaitis, shot off rounds from a hunting rifle, held a man hostage, and then gave up to the police. And almost year after the Loukaitis killings, victim Arnold Fritz’s cousin, Aaron Harmon, 14, a 9th grader at Chief Moses Junior High School, shot and killed his 9-year-old step sister, his mother, and himself at their Moses Lake home on December 7, 1996. Distressed over the death of his cousin – whom he considered a brother -- at the hands of Loukaitis, Harmon decided to employ the same method for his rampage, a hunting rifle” (Coleman:4:2004).

In order to firmly establish how each the school shooting subsequent to the Frontier Middle School incident in 1996 contributed to the cultural script that we now know, I have identified, through various media outlets as well as through published research, a list of events that I would like to propose as part of the cultural script of school shootings. In the following table, ‘Repeat Elements’ refers to elements present in subsequent school shootings that were also present in the media coverage of school shooting events prior to that specific event. ‘New Elements’ are elements that were introduced to the script through the media coverage. To gain salience in the script, elements of school shootings must be proposed by the media as key elements in the understanding of the shooting. The conceptual basis behind this table is the proposition that if school shootings are indeed cultural scripts, we will see repeat elements from previous incidents in subsequent incidents. The more mediatized an incident is, the more likely its defining elements will find their way into further incidents. Some elements, however, may also be introduced to the cultural script through other forms of media entertainment (such as through films and novels) as it is the case in the first incident at Frontier Middle School where the shooter is said to have been first inspired by King’s *Rage* and the movie *Natural Born Killers*. The media also has referred to Ted Kaczynski, the so-called ‘Unabomber,’ as one of the influences of the Columbine shooters.

The elements that are introduced into the school shooting cultural script through their popularity in the media as ‘causes’ for the shooting or as leading ‘factors’ in the shooters’ decisions are not rooted in the official police investigation. In fact, some of these elements are fabricated by the media in an effort to conform to the model of ‘infotainment’ proposed by Kellner. The purpose of this research is not to pinpoint what is ‘true’ but rather to explore the salience of these elements as representative of the overall cultural script. It is highly interesting to see how and why these elements resonate with some young men to the point of planning and committing a school shooting themselves.

The incidents included in this research were so because they were labeled as ‘school shootings’ in the media. Thus, rather than adhering to a strict definition of the term ‘school shooting’ – a definition usually established through various checkpoint-like lists – as school shooting research traditionally does, I have included in the following table all the incidents that were labeled school shootings when reported in the media. Again, the main concern is determining how the incidents were reported rather than validating the ‘true facts’ surrounding these shootings, or validating the incidents themselves as ‘true’ school shootings.

Finally, the following table will demonstrate how the elements that figure in the Dawson school shooting were directly adopted from earlier incidents, thereby demonstrating the existence of an on-going cultural script of school shooting.

Event	Repeat Elements	New Elements
<p>1. Barry Loukaitis 14 years old</p> <p>Moose Lake, Washington USA</p> <p>February 2 1996</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Said to have been inspired by popular violent media, including the movie <i>Natural Born Killers</i> and Stephen King's novel '<i>Rage</i> (Egan,1988). • Wore a black trench coat (Egan, 1998). • Made a signature remark: "This sure beats algebra" (Tuzon, 1997). • Evidence of early planning (<i>Spin Magazine</i>, 1997). • Inspired by violent music and films (<i>Spin Magazine</i>, 1997). • Self-Identified as avenger; Viewed his actions as the only way to reestablish justice and 'fight evil' (Tuzon, 1997). • Was an honor student, with an above-average IQ (Tuzon, 1997). • Was called 'dork' and 'gay-Lord' by older boys at school (Tuzon, 1997).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was repeatedly teased by Manuel Vela Jr., a “popular, athletic boy in his algebra class” whom he shot and killed during his rampage (Tuzon, 1997). • Was diagnosed with bipolar disorder post-shooting (Tuzon, 1997). • Had a difficult relationship with his mother whom he described as overbearing. Mrs. Loukaitis told the court how she explained to her son - a few weeks before the shooting - that she was planning to kidnap her ex-husband and his mistress to commit suicide in front of them. (Andersen, 1997).
<p>2. Evan Ramsey 16 years old</p> <p>Bethel, ALaska USA</p> <p>February 1997</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was teased and humiliated at school. He was called “Screech” by other students, the outcast and “nerdy” character from the hit television show <i>Saved by the Bell</i> (Avila, 2001) • Was an outsider who did not fit in with the athletic and popular kids at his school (<i>CBS 60 minutes, 1999</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used a shotgun stolen from his foster home (CNN Library, 2014) • Shot randomly into the crowd of students in hallways (Jerome, 2001) • Played violent video games on a daily basis, most notably <i>Doom</i> (<i>CBS 60 minutes, 1999</i>) • His girlfriend had just broke up with him a few days

		<p>before the shooting (<i>CBS 60 minutes</i>, 1999)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had planned the shooting with two of his friends (Avila, 2001)
<p>3. Luke Woodham 16 years old</p> <p>Pearl, Mississippi USA</p> <p>October 1 1997</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shot randomly into the crowd of students in front of his school (Hewitt, 1997) • Had an overbearing mother who repeatedly interfered in his first and only romantic relationship with Christina Menefee (Cloud-Springfield, 2001) • Was called ‘gay’ at school by other students (Cloud-Springfield, 2001) • Was in the social ‘fringe’ at school and was also unpopular with girls (Hewitt, 1997). • Shared his plans with friends before the shooting (Hewitt, 1997) • Wore a baggy overcoat the day of the shooting (Hewitt, 1997) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was a member of a Neo-Nazi/Satanist group (Cloud-Springfield, 2001) • Was part of a ‘gothic’ group who wore black trench coats (Chua-Eoan, 2001) • Stabbed his mother to death the morning before the rampage (Cloud-Springfield, 2001) • Shot and killed his former girlfriend (Cloud-Springfield, 2001) • Was inspired by <i>The Secret History</i>, a best-selling novel about New England college students and murder (Chua-Eoan, 2001) • Wrote a 5 pages manifesto where he rants about being defeated by society and how is is planning to ‘strike back’. He writes: <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“ (...) I shall tell you one thing, I am malicious because I am miserable. The world has beaten me.</i></p>

		<p><i>Wednesday 1, 1997 shall go down in history as the day I fought back” (Hewitt,1997).</i></p> <p>Integral Manifesto recovered online: http://schoolshooters.info/PL/Original_Documents_files/Luke%20Woodham%20Writings.pdf</p>
<p>4. Michael Carneal 14 years old</p> <p>West Paducah, Kentucky USA</p> <p>December 1 1997</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was allegedly inspired by the movie <i>The Basketball Diaries</i>, which depicts a scene in which the main protagonist shoots a teacher in a classroom (Grace, 2001). • Played the computer game <i>Doom</i> repeatedly (Cloud, 2001). • Was rumored to be having a romantic relationship with another boy in the gossip column of the school newspaper and was bullied as a result called ‘gay’ and ‘faggot’ (Cloud, 2001). • Had a successful athletic and popular older sister to whom he felt he couldn’t measure up (Cloud, 2001). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shot at random towards a routine morning prayer group meeting (Grace, 2001).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had shown an interest in a girl who didn't reciprocate (Cloud, 2001). • Perpetrated the shooting in a desperate attempt to be accepted by a group of 'goth' kids (Newman, CNN, 2004). • Talked of his plan before the shooting and was allegedly encouraged to pursue his plan by friends (Glaberson, 2000). 	
<p>5. Joseph 'Colt' Todd 14 years old</p> <p>Stamps, Arkansas USA</p> <p>December 6 1997</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Randomly shot into the crowd (Stalling, 2013). 	
<p>6. Andrew Golden 11 years old and Mitchell Johnson 13 years old</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The two shooters had planned on how to injure the most victims: luring their classmates into the school yard by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First school shooters to plan and carry the attack as a pair (A boy Killer Speaks By David Koon <i>Arkansas Times</i>, 2008). • Andrew Golden remains the youngest school shooter to

<p>Jonesboro, Arkansas USA</p> <p>March 24th 1998</p>	<p>pulling the fire alarm (Peisner, 2013).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden shot his former girlfriend during the attack (Cloud-Springfield, 2001). • Mitchell had reportedly talked of suicide when spurned by a girl at his school (Cloud-Springfield, 2001). 	<p>date at age 11 (Koon, 2008).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only school shooters who did not commit suicide and who are not currently incarcerated. Andrew Golden was released in 2007 and Mitchell Johnson in 2005 (Peisner, 2013).
<p>7. Kip Kinkel 15 year old</p> <p>Springfield Oregon</p> <p>May 21st, 1998</p> <p>USA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had a successful athletic and popular older sister to whom he felt he couldn't measure up to (Cloud-Springfield, 2001). • Made the signature remark before shooting his mother in the back of the head "I love you mom" (Kirk, 2000). • Wore a full length trench coat on the day of the shooting (Bernstein, 2013). • Was afraid of being bullied and decided to learn how to defend himself by taking karate lessons (Kirk, 2000). • Shot his parents the night before the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opened fire and shot at random in his school cafeteria (Verhovek, 1999). • Had a troubled father-son relationship (Kirk, 2000).

	<p>attack (Verhovek, 1999).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showed a marked interest in earlier school shooting (Kirk, 2000). • Kept a diary in which he devised his plans (Kirk, 2000). • Diagnosed pre-shooting with depression disorder (Kirk, 2000). • Used guns and handguns that were given to him by his father (Kirk, 2000). 	
<p>8. Shawn Cooper 16 year old</p> <p>Notus, Idaho USA</p> <p>April 16th, 1999</p> <p>USA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnosed pre-shooting with bipolar disorder (Associated Press, 1999). • Had made a 'hit' list (Gallagher, 1999). • Took firearms from his own residence (Gallagher, 1999). 	
<p>9. Eric Harris 18 year old and Dylan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wore trench coats at the shooting. Had 	

<p>Klebold 17 year old</p> <p>Littleton, Colorado</p> <p>April 20th 1999</p> <p>USA</p>	<p>been involved with a group of friends that called themselves ‘the trenchcoat mafia’ (Greene, Briggs , 1999).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were part of a fringe cultural group at school, which was allegedly bullied by what was referred to as the ‘jocks’ - to athletic popular students (Greene, 1999). • Shot at random beginning in the school cafeteria (Obmascik, 1999). • Both shooters kept extensive diaries detailing their feelings (Coffman, 2009). • Made a ‘kill’ list (Emery, Lipsher and Young, 1999). • Had both victims of bullying and were outcasts in the school social system (Emery, Lipsher and Young, 1999). • Were part of “goth’ culture (Briggs and Greene, 1999). • Were involved with the Neo-Nazi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made the so-called ‘basement tapes’ where they taped several hours of themselves explaining why they were planning to execute a school shooting (Coffman, 2009) • Had been planning the shooting for over a year (Coffman, 1999). • Were very active online on a website called “The Trenchcoat Mafia,” where they allegedly wrote about the shooting prior to the event (Greene, 1999). • Made artisanal explosives (Obmascik, 1999).
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	<p>movement and Satanism (Briggs and Greene, 1999).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made several signature remarks during the shooting. For example, they allegedly asked born-again student Cassie Bernall whether she believed in God before shooting her in the head. This incident was later challenged by several eyewitnesses. (Coffman, 2009). 	
<p>10. T.J. Solomon 15 years old</p> <p>Conyers, Georgia USA</p> <p>May 20 1999</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnosed post-shooting with depression (Associated Press, CNN, 1999). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was inspired by Columbine (Reuters, 1999). • Discussed with his friend how he would execute the school shooting more successfully than the Columbine shooters (Reuters, 1999).
<p>11. Seth Trickey 13 years old</p> <p>Fort Gibson, Oklahoma USA</p> <p>December 6 1999</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used a 9mm handgun that he took from his father (Jackson, 1999). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was described as the perfect student (Jackson, 1999).

<p>12. Charles Andrew Williams 15 years old</p> <p>Santee, California USA</p> <p>March 5 2001</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stole a gun from his father (Ling, 2013). • Called a ‘skinny faggot’ at school (Richard Jerome, 2001). • Had a troubled father-son relationship (McCarthy, 2001). • Was violently bullied on a daily basis (Ling, 2013). • Told his friends he was going to ‘pull a Columbine’ in response to a dare from other students (McCarthy, 2001). 	
<p>13. Jason Hoffman 18 years old</p> <p>El Cajon, California USA</p> <p>March 22 2001</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made the signature remark: “I’m going to get you” while holding a gun in the school principal’s direction before starting his rampage (Perry, 2001). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grandfather of the shooter, whom he shot and killed, was member of the police force (Randall, 2005).

<p>14. Jeffrey Weise 16 years old</p> <p>Red Lake, Minnesota USA</p> <p>March 22 2005</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed to a neo-nazi website under the username 'The Angel of Death' (Associated Press, 2005). • Shot and killed his grandfather prior to the shooting (Associated Press, 2005). • Had planned to execute his shooting rampage on the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birthday. (Randall, 2005). • No reported signature remarks but was reportedly grinning and waving at students with his gun (Randall, 2005). 	
<p>15. Kimveer Gill 25 year old</p> <p>Montreal, Quebec Canada</p> <p>September 13 2006</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Called himself 'The Angel of Death' online (CBC news, 2006). • Wore a black trench coat on the day of the shooting (CBC news, 2006). • Was shy and quiet in high school but not bullied (<i>The Gazette</i>, 2008). • Part of the 'Goth' culture (Radio Canada, 2006). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not attend the school where he committed his rampage (<i>The Gazette</i>, 2008). • Was enrolled in the military for a limited time and 'honorably discharged' for undisclosed reasons (<i>The Gazette</i>, 2008)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shared his admiration for the Columbine Shooters on his blog on the platform VampireFreaks.com (Regina Leader Post, 2006).• Played violent video games, most notably '<i>Postal 2</i>' in which the main character goes on a to get back at society for mistreating him (Regina Leader Post, 2006).	
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Based on the data collected and presented in the table above, there are several key factors that are presented as repeat elements, which seem to be salient for most of school shooting coverage: diary keeping, discussing the rampage with friends, wearing black trench-coats or army like apparel, making signature remarks during the rampage, and fascination with Hitler, Neo-Nazi or Satanism. Furthermore, as we will see in the Chapter four, when various media report school shootings, they often set up the shooter to be on some kind of crusade, getting back at the ‘athletic and popular kids’ for having been ostracized by them. This premise is certainly present in the reports of school shootings, and appeared to gain prominence as the cultural script defined itself based on previous shootings. As we can see in the growing occurrence of repeat elements, most school shooters found their motivation in previous school shootings. While some made this explicit, directly linking themselves with particular shooters, others, by enacting the same script inscribed themselves in the same dialogue. Coverage of school shootings often posits the shooters in the ‘Jocks’ vs ‘Geeks’ analogy. ‘Jocks’, those athletic, popular students representing the apogee of hegemonic masculinity while ‘Geeks’ represent a failure to achieve these standards. Furthermore, this analogy seems to be salient in most depiction of adolescence in North-American media: films, novels, music, video games etc. However, the ‘Jocks vs Geeks’ discourse is hardly gender-defined, thus one of the most important question remains, what in this particularly violent and self-destructive script resonates so well with some young men. Newman writes:

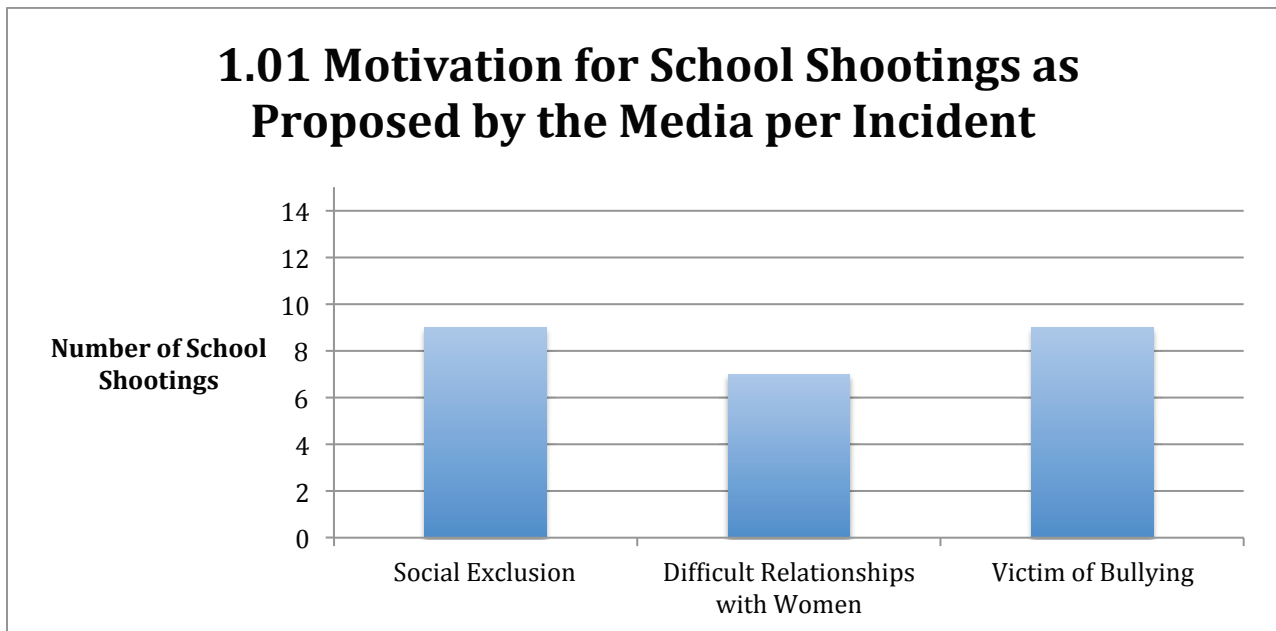
“Powerless in their normal day-to-day existence, school shooters gain a few moments of invincibility when they wield a shotgun and are not afraid to use it (Newman:2004:249)”.

While it might difficult to understand how a young man can come to see the planning and execution of a mass shooting as a solution to changing his social situation, we must understand how crucial social positions are, especially in a school context: “When they feel ignored or mistreated by their peers, teens try to change their social position (Newman:2004:246)”. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the data presented above in order to explore in more

depth the school shootings cultural script and what can be learned from this thematic analysis.

II. Tracing and Understanding the Cultural Script

Analysis of the coverage of the school shootings presented above reveals a pattern, one that governs how school shooters are portrayed by the media. The three narrative strategies that seem to be overwhelmingly present in the coverage are as follows: 1. School shooters suffer from social exclusion; they are on fringe of their high-school culture. 2. They maintain difficult relationships with women. Some are said to have had overachieving sisters or devastating breakups. Some are said to have been unpopular with girls. 3. They are victims of bullying, and their bullies are usually more popular students. This is where the ‘Jocks’ vs ‘Geeks’ analogy comes into play: school shooters are essentially taking revenge on a status system that has not favored them. In the following, we will see how these three narrative strategies, which are essentially the contrary of what hegemonic masculinity dictates, are used to describe school shooters in the media coverage.



❖ Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is one of the main motivations for school shootings as proposed by the media. Table 1.01 depicts that media coverage of nine of the 15 school shooting incidents detailed in this research mentioned that the shooter had experienced some type of social exclusion. In his article *Of Arms and Boys*, John Cloud maintains that:

“In their isolation, the boys seemed to suffer an erosion of self-esteem. Partly it was their physical awkwardness: Michael and Kip were small for their age; Mitchell and Luke were pudgy. Furth describes Mitchell as "a sensitive, soft 13-year-old"; in Arkansas, where little boys are taught to be flinty and stoic, softness is a handicap. Luke and Michael were teased about their physical appearance (both were called "gay," the latter in the school paper)” (John Cloud/Springfield, 2001, *Time Magazine*).

Additionally, Evan Ramsey is also depicted as “an outsider, someone who didn’t fit in with the athletes and popular kids at school” (CBS *60 minutes*, 1999). These descriptions also serve to depict other school shooters such as Barry Loukaitis, Kimveer Gill, Erric Haris and Dylan Klebold. Essentially, these young men were outcasts because they did not have the ideal ‘hegemonic’ body associated with the ‘Jocks’: a strong and athletic physique. Rather, they are described as ‘pudgy’, ‘sensitive’ and ‘soft’, attributes that can qualify as feminine within hegemonic masculinity. As we have established before, hegemonic masculinity is built on a repudiation of the feminine (Brennon, 1976).

While media have traditionally portrayed school shooters as loners, as shown in this research and as corroborated by Newman, it is important to point out that, according to Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG), the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), only “about one in ten were known to have no close

friends. Yet neither were school shooters socially successful” (Newman:2004:235). This is an important distinction: while shooters saw themselves as socially unsuccessful this doesn’t mean that they were friendless. In fact, most of them not only had friends, but also had friends who were *aware* of their plans to commit a rampage (Newman:2004). Nevertheless, according to Newman’s estimate, nearly four out of five school shooters are marginal kids at their schools (Newman:2004). If school shooters are overconformists in a hegemonic masculine culture, this inability to maintain successful social relationships and a popular social status in their respective schools certainly weighted heavily on their shoulders. Indeed, they were unable to achieve what they saw as the ultimate masculinity persona; hence they must have felt the failure to meet their own expectations and increasingly became hostile and bitter towards society, which they felt created and held these unattainable standards. The fact that most school shooters become heavily depressed is perhaps related to this inability to live up to their idealized yet improbable male personas. Newman reports that four out of five school shooters have a history of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts before they open fire (Newman:2004).

❖ Difficult Relationships with Women

The fact that a good deal of school shooters were reported to have troubled relationship with the women in their lives has been surprisingly absent from scholarly attention. This present research proposes the following statistic, which is unprecedented in school shooting research: out of the 15 incidents investigated, seven are said to have been partly motivated by difficult relationships with mothers, sisters or girlfriends. For example, a *People Magazine* article includes details about Luke Woodham’s relationship with his mother, based on the testimony of the parents of Christina Meneffe, Woodham’s ex-girlfriend. Woodham shot and killed both his mother and ex-girlfriend before going on a rampage at his school:

“The murder of Woodham's mother was even more puzzling. Mary Ann, who had been divorced for five years and worked as a receptionist at a food company, seemed a concerned if over-protective parent. The Meneffes recall that when Luke came to see Christina, he always

brought his mother, which they thought was just Southern custom. Luke seemed to suffer his mother's presence with only occasional hints of impatience. Once, when he and Christy were sitting together on the family love seat, says Bob Menefee, Mary Ann asked, 'Do you think y'all sitting close enough?' Luke took Christy's hand and replied, 'We're doing just fine, Mom,' says Menefee" (Bill Hewitt, *The Avenger*, *People Magazine*, 1997).

Similarly, in the case of Barry Loukaitis, we are told of the troubling relationship he shared with his mother who often confided to him the details of her failed marriage, as well as her plan to kidnap her ex-husband and his mistress in order to commit suicide in front of them. Evan Ramsey had an alcoholic mother and eventually ended up in foster care where he was sexually molested. Kip Kinkel and Micheal Carneal both had successful, popular and athletic sisters to whom they couldn't measure up, while Andrew Golden, Mitchell Johnson and Dyland Klebold had either suffered break-ups or had fallen in love with girls who didn't reciprocate their feelings. These narratives of romantic rejection, coupled with the presence of overbearing or troubled mothers paint a portrait of young men unable to conform to the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, in order to conform to such a culture, a man should enjoy successful relationships with women characterized by their admiration and respect of his authority, be it mothers, sisters or love interests. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity dictates that men, above all, should be unemotional, independent and in control in their relationships.

The articles mentioned above suggest that these boys could not control the relationships they shared with the women in their lives, and were not able to maintain romantic relationships or spark the interest of girls. But more importantly, the articles convey that these difficulties could be seen as motivation for mass shooting. This narrative underlines the importance many young men place on enjoying successful relationships with women. When these types of relationships prove impossible, the result could be murderous. This sentiment, though never made explicit, is at the very least inferred in most media coverage of school shootings. As we have seen earlier, Bird proposes that, in order to gain salience in the public news media must propose stories that are already cultural salient (2003). In the case presented here, the fact that these boys had

troubled relationship with the women in their life proved to be salient enough to be included in nearly half of the school shooting coverage analyzed for this research. This fact alone shed a light on an important aspect of gender relationships and gendered violence in popular culture while perpetrating the hegemonic masculinity discourse: if these young boys were more in control, more naturally conforming to the norms hegemonic aspect of masculinity, they would have not murdered their girlfriends or mothers.

❖ Experiences of Bullying

Bullying is perhaps the most cited explanation for school shootings, present in the media coverage of nine of the 15 incidents. In his article *Warning: Andy Williams here. Unhappy kid, Tired of being picked*, Terry McCarthy writes:

“Williams was instantly picked on by the bigger, more streetwise kids there. Laura Kennamer, a friend of Andy's, saw kids burning their lighters and then pressing the hot metal against his neck. ‘They'd walk up to him and sock him in the face for no reason,’ she says. ‘He wouldn't do anything about it.’ Jennifer Chandler, a freshman, saw the same pattern of torment: “Kids were mean to him. He'd slack it off. Like he kept it all inside” (Terry McCarthy, Time Magazine, March 11, 2001).

Andrew Williams’ case is perhaps the incident of school shooting in which the most vicious bullying was uncovered. Indeed, Newman writes that “Williams wasn’t just called names; he was also bullied, and some of the incidents bordered on torture” (Newman:2004:242). However, Williams is one of the few school shooting cases to go to trial. These trials tend to revolve around details about the shooter, seeing as the defense often tries to plead insanity or attenuating circumstances, detailing the defendant’s experiences of being bullied or his mental health condition at the time of the shooting. Thus other school shooters might have had similarly traumatic bullying experiences, however, since most commit suicide, this question remains largely unanswered.

This rhetoric becomes perhaps even more salient with regards to the Columbine shooting, seeing as the ‘Jocks’ vs ‘Geeks’ analogy is overtly present. Criminologist Ralph Larkin writes on the matter: “In the basement videotapes, Eric Harris opined that their actions would ‘kick-start a revolution’ of oppressed students who had been victimized and bullied by their peers” (Lurkin:2009:1312). The media quickly adopted these allegations and soon the portrait of the Columbine boys became one of anti-heroes on a crusade to exert revenge on bullies when their school system failed to do so. In fact, this narrative resonated so deeply with the public that, in an interview with the Huffington Post, David Finkelhor, the director of the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center, noted that “anti-bullying programs had proliferated and received funding boosts following the 1999 Columbine High School shootings in Colorado” (Columbine School Shooting Spawned Effective Anti-Bullying Programs: Study by David Crary, Huffington Post, March 2010).

Whether the Columbine boys were actually bullied is a much more complicated question to answer. Dave Cullen, a journalist who is now famous for his book on Columbine writes that while the boys were occasionally bullied they were certainly not the butt of *every* joke and, in fact, they had many friends. Furthermore, their affiliation with the Trench Coat Mafia, a group of fringe students at Columbine High School who were reportedly bullying students themselves, only proves that the roles of bully and bullied are much more complex than what the media had initially reported.

Thus the bullying experienced by the Columbine pair seems to have been much more subtle than that experienced by Williams and also, to a certain extent, institutionalized. Indeed, the Columbine school system certainly seemed to encourage and reinforce a certain type of hegemonic masculinity that the pair couldn't achieve. A ground-breaking article in the Washington Post exposes the class system in operation at Columbine High School at the time of the shooting, one which systematically privileges hegemonic masculinity by continuously promoting the athletic students over other students. Authors Lorraine Adams and Dave Russakoff maintain:

“The state wrestling champ was regularly permitted to park his \$100,000 Hummer all day in a 15-minute space. A football player was allowed to tease a girl about her breasts in class without fear of retribution by his teacher, also the boy's coach. The sports trophies were showcased in the front hall -- the artwork, down a back corridor. Columbine High School is a culture where initiation rituals meant upper-class wrestlers twisted the nipples of freshman wrestlers until they turned purple and tennis players sent hard volleys to younger teammates' backsides. Sports pages in the yearbook were in color, a national debating team and other clubs in black and white. The homecoming king was a football player on probation for burglary. All of it angered and oppressed Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, leading to the April day when they staged their murderous rampage here, killing 13 and wounding 21.” (By Lorraine Adams and Dale Russakoff, *Washington Post Staff Writers* , Saturday, June 12, 1999; Page A1)

Clearly then, the school in question seem to institutionalize hegemonic masculinity [this is a fertile ground for further research, one which has already been touched on in the work of C. J. Pascoe in her 2007 book ‘Dude, You’re a Fag’]. One can only wonder how many young men would have not chosen this cultural script of violence and self-destruction had they been able to thrive in a school system that reflected a wide array of different masculinities, rather than what Adams and Russakoff calls “The cult of the athlete” (1999). In this famous quote by sociologist Erving Guffman, we clearly see the importance of sports, among other things, to achieve hegemonic masculinity in North American culture:

“In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself during moments at least as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior (Guffman in Kimmel:1963:128)

❖ Other Motivations

While existing on the social fringe, maintaining troubled relationships with women, and being victims of bullying for not conforming to an athletic hard-bodied masculinity are the most cited motivations for school shootings in the media articles analyzed by this research, other motivations were also mentioned, including violent films, novels, and video games as well as other school shootings. As is depicted in Table 1.02, movies (such as *The Basketball Diaries* and *Natural Born Killers*), the novel *Rage*, and the video game *Doom* are said to have served as motivations for the school shooters in four out of 15 incidents. Shooters responsible for seven out of 15 incidents have claimed to be inspired by previous school shootings, most notably by the Columbine shooting. This fascination with the Columbine shooting by subsequent shooters is not surprising considering that it was by far the most publicized school shooting at the time (Larkin:2009).

Kimveer Gill was allegedly obsessed with playing *Postal 2* a game in which a man goes on a mass shooting rampage. This troubling game is based on the tragedy that occurred in Edmond, Oklahoma in 1986 during which a man named Patrick Sherrill, a former post office employee, shot and killed 14 of his former co-workers before committing suicide. The tremendous impact this event had on popular culture is made evident when taking into consideration the phrase it served to coin: “going postal”. With its entry into language as a reference to a specific narrative of revenge mass murder, we could perhaps argue that ‘going postal’ is a cultural script that has perhaps influenced the school shooting cultural script. While further research is needed to corroborate this claim, one thing is certain: the Columbine pair and Kimveer Gill were both very aware of the Edmond tragedy and considered themselves Sherrill’s equals. They were indeed planning to ‘go postal’.

On the link between violent media, video games and school shootings Newman writes that:

“Exposure to violent media has increased dramatically among our youth over the last decade, pushing media influence forward as a prime

explanation for the string of school shootings in the mid- to late 1990s” (Newman:2004:70).

While violent media has become a favorite scapegoat, being accorded the blame for all of the incidents presented above, Newman urges us to consider research that has shown that exposure to media violence:

“Is consistently associated with a variety of antisocial behaviors, from trivial violence against toys to serious criminal violence. Children who are exposed to media violence tend to identify violence as the best solution to a problem or to exhibit hostility and nonviolent but aggressive behavior” (Newman:2004:70).

While this might seem to be a powerful argument, we must remember that violent media such as the game *Postal 2* are mainly representative of already-existing cultural scripts, ones which resonate so strongly with their audience precisely because of their familiarity. As Bird proposes, any particular story could not inspire such wide-spread public attention if it did not mirror existing scripts in the popular culture, or if it did not challenge established morals (Bird, 2003). Movies like *The Basketball Diaries* or *Natural Born Killers* represent just that for most viewers: mirrors of the familiar, as well as challenges to the established order. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason why such movies become blueprints for some to commit heinous crimes. However, we can hypothesize that the image of hyper-masculinity emanating from these various media productions can be especially appealing to some boys who feel themselves unable to attain these standards. Indeed, while discussing Michael Carneal’s fascination with the movie *The Basketball Diaries* and his enjoyment of violent video games, Newman remarks:

“Although it would be far too simplistic to say that Michael’s actions were caused by the movies he saw, violent video games and media provided a template for action and images of masculinity that appealed to a boy who felt weak and socially inappropriate” (Newman:2004:71).

Keeping all of these factors in mind, we shall discuss how these factors came into play in the planning and execution of the Dawson College shooting by Kimveer Gill.

Chapter IV

School Shootings as Cultural Scripts: The Dawson School Shooting - A Case Study

While some may conceive of school shootings as a typically American phenomenon, it is important to consider that four school shootings have occurred in Canada, two of which took place in Montreal. The first of the Montreal shootings occurred on December 6th, 1989: Mark Lépine opened fire and killed 14 female engineering students at the Polytechnique. Lépine had separated the female from the male students and only shot the females. He allegedly claimed before firing “I hate Feminists”. The second Montreal shooting occurred on September 16th, 2006, when a young man named Kimveer Gill opened fire at Dawson College.

This research focuses on this second incident rather than the first since the Polytechnique shooting occurred in 1989, before the beginning of the cultural script of school shootings. Furthermore, the Polytechnique shooting has been at the center of much scholarly interest while six years after the event, there is still no scholarly research that has focused on the Dawson school shooting other than a health report directed towards the creation of new policies and guidelines (see for example ‘*Le Collège Dawson, Le 13 Septembre 2006*’ by the *Service de police de la Ville de Montréal*, published in July 2007).

Similarly to other so-called Columbine ‘copycats,’ Kimveer Gill – following the cultural script - devised a plan which was initially to be carried out on April 20, 2005, the anniversary of the Columbine shooting. A shortage of ammunition and guns led him to act much later, on September 13, 2006, at which point he successfully terrorized the students and staff at Dawson College, leaving one dead and 17 wounded before taking his own life.

Gill's open admiration of the Columbine pair is undeniable. Psychologist Peter Langman, who serves on Pennsylvania's Joint State Government Commission's Advisory Committee on Violence Prevention, and who has written extensively on the psychology of school shooters, points out in his online article "Adult School Shooters":

"One notable feature of Gill's postings is the extent to which he appears to be influenced by Eric Harris. First, in a list of his 'likes' he includes 'Reb and V (Modern Day Saints).' Reb was Eric Harris's nickname and V was short for Vodka, which was Dylan Klebold's nickname. Identifying Harris and Klebold not only as people he likes, but as 'modern day saints' indicates Gill's attitude toward them. Nor was this attitude a secret. At least two of Gill's friends knew that he was highly interested in the attack at Columbine" (Langman 5:2012).

Clearly, the media coverage of the Columbine incident was readily available to just about anyone who wanted to know more about the shooting and the shooters. It is highly probable that all the information on the Columbine shooting to which Gill might have had access came from different media outlets, seeing as he was located in Montreal and seeing as there is no evidence that he had any contact with the Columbine pair. This information was likely gleaned from various sources: the internet, television, movies, or music. Seeing as Gill was obviously influenced by Columbine, the ways in which the Columbine shooters were depicted in these media productions is highly relevant to our ability to understand the circumstances surrounding the Dawson shooting. Additionally, it is important to try to determine what exactly in this media coverage resonated with Gill to such an extent that he decided to commit his own rampage. I hypothesize that it is precisely the hegemonically masculine personas of the shooters in the school shooting cultural script, aptly described by King as 'bogyboys', that spoke to Gill, who was, himself, a young man whose gender identity did not fit western norms as we will see later on. Through his violent actions, I argue that Gill aggressively claimed what he felt society had prevented him from achieving: his male identity.

I. D-Day

“My name is Trench, I’m going to die today, Farewell“

*Kimveer Gill, quote from his online profile
on VampireFreaks on the day of the shooting*

In order to set the stage for the following analysis, the following is a description of the events which took place that day as narrated by five different individuals, all of whom were either on site or nearby on the day of the shooting. Notably, most of them start their narratives by explaining that they had been on the campus that day by complete chance. For instance, on the morning of September 13th 2006, one of my interviewees, Amy, lingered after her humanities class to discuss the requirements for an upcoming essay with her professor. Another interviewee, Sabrina, was killing time in front of the college’s main entrance on Maisonneuve Street with her mother and friends before a doctor’s appointment nearby. Sabrina usually attended night school, but on that Wednesday she had decided to visit the campus with her mother and have lunch with her friends. Steven, another interviewees, was also not following his usual routine. After having attended an early appointment at the bank he decided to catch up with a friend on campus before the beginning of his classes. Viviane was entering the cafeteria of a different college – one located a few kilometers away from Dawson – at the time of the shooting. Finally, Joseph, a now retired physical education teacher, was in his office.

The time was 11:40am when a depressed, suicidal and heavily-armed young man named Kimveer Gill pulled up about 100 meters from where Sabrina was standing with her friends near the college’s entrance, in the car he stole from his mother. His legally registered arsenal was composed of a Glock .45 caliber, a civilian version of the army issued Beretta carbine, 4 knives, and a total of 1756 rounds. According to the medical examiner, Gill had been drinking whisky that morning, his alcohol blood level registering at 76mg/dL, nearly twice the limit for driving. One can only imagine how differently the day could have unfolded had Gill been intercepted by the police for drunk driving while *en route* to Dawson College from his home in Laval.

Dressed according to the script, Gill was wearing a long black trench coat and army boots. He also sported a freshly shaved mohawk. Heading towards Dawson he suddenly took a passerby hostage, forcing him at gunpoint to hold his arsenal and walk alongside him. At this point, from the other side of the street another passerby called 911, exactly two minutes before the first shot was fired. In front of Dawson, Sabrina sees Gill for the first time, heading in her direction:

“I remember we had been in a circle, standing out front. My friends had been smoking and I was looking over my friend's shoulder and I saw this guy walking down the street and he looked like something out of a movie. He had like a long black coat, big boots and there was a police car not far away from us and then like all of a sudden he just like ... like-it-really like the one thing I kept thinking was ‘this is like in the movies’ where is like whipped the gun out from under his coat. My first thought was ... ‘the cops are going to yell at him for having a gun that looks so real’ and then I fell. I didn’t understand why I was falling it felt like somebody hit me with a rock or something and I just, I just couldn’t move anymore. I just laid there starring around, hearing everybody freak out. It took a while to actually come to my senses and realize what was going on.”

It is highly interesting that Amy felt that what she was experiencing something that was exactly like ‘in the movies’. In fact, she was recognizing the unfolding of a script that she was already very familiar with: the school shooting script. I believe that this recognition of what was happening accounts for her sensation of *déjà vu*: of being witness to the reenactment of a known scripted behavior that she has only seen in movies and news media previously. While it is believed that Gill had initially planned to start shooting once inside the school, following the script established by previous shooters, the police car parked in front of the school surprised and destabilized him, perhaps causing him to start shooting right away at the entrance. This police car, much like some of my interviewees, was also on site by complete coincidence, having been

called in earlier on a drug-related charge. Along with David – who does not recall the few instants before he was repeatedly shot – and Sabrina, four other individuals were shot during that initial fire. From his office window Joseph saw several students falling to ground, without hearing any shots. *“I thought for a moment that a sniper was on top of the Alexis Nihon building.”* Joseph, having ducked to his knees with the window at eye level, remembers, very vividly, having been afraid that the shots penetrate his office window:

“I remember talking on the phone with Tony (another teacher whose office was next door). He was seeing the same thing from his window. He took his first aid kit and went outside. He just said ‘Goodbye, I gotta go’ then a few seconds later, I saw him outside with the police trying to help the wounded students who were outside.”

After firing outside, Gill entered Dawson through the west entrance on Maisonneuve, forgetting about the hostage holding his bag of ammunition. The hostage, who saw an opportunity to escape, stopped to help a wounded victim and indicated to two nearby police officers the location of the ammunition bag, which he had tossed near an adjacent vehicle. From the first shot to the time when Gill entered the building, only 12 seconds had passed. Once in the building, Gill shot at random while making his way to the cafeteria. Following him, the two officers yelled ‘Drop your weapon!’ while trying, unsuccessfully, to target Gill. Two seconds later, now out of ammunition, Gill entered the atrium and hid behind a vending machine to reload. Joseph remembers:

“I could hear walking right beside my door, two students were heading towards the atrium, I pulled them into the office. Then I heard about 20 shots. They were really loud, I could hear them almost as if they were fired right outside my door, that’s how loud it was.”

Amy was also heading out to the atrium, completely unaware of what was unfolding a few

meters away:

“I was on my way down and then all of a sudden there was like people running down the hall in the opposite direction of the cafeteria so I was just kind of like ... what’s ... like it was a little odd, I wasn’t really sure ... They didn’t say anything and then all of a sudden like ‘par chance’ I saw... umm... my friend... umm... from high school actually and he was like ‘shootings! Someone’s got a gun-knife’ he was just saying some kind of like not really like comprehensible things but like obviously like like if someone says gun or shot or or like knife like I heard a bunch of different things being tossed around and he was just like ‘run’ and I was like ‘oh shit!’ so we just ran with rest of them we got out... umm... and I was asking him what was going on. (...) he said that someone had a gun in the cafeteria he didn’t see anything I don’t think but I think he heard something and then he saw people running and then that’s how, that’s what got us all running huh we got out (...) honestly its such a blur but he looked over and I, I’m so glad that I decided to not [look] I was like ‘no I can’t have any like like I don’t want images. I just averted my eyes and then apparently he heard, we heard another couple gun shots so boom we just took off running as fast as we could in whatever direction.”

At this point, Gill, still hidden behind a vending machine in the atrium, was holding both the handgun and the carbine, one in each hand and shooting at random, hitting several students, one of which would become Gill’s only casualty, Anastasia De Sousa. Police reinforcement arrived and started hiding in various vantage points on the mezzanine above. They attempt to engage the shooter but were unable to make a clear shot. At 12:50, only ten minutes since the beginning of the shooting, Gill, still hidden from the police, sent a male student to report back to him about where the police were hidden. The student, clearly seeing the police, lied to Gill, claiming that he could not see them at all. Gill then asked the same student to report on Anastasia's condition,

asking him “Is she dead yet?” to which the student replied that ‘she doesn't look too good’ and begged Gill to let him take her outside to the ambulance, promising to return immediately afterward. Instead of granting his permission, Gill approached Anastasia, who hadn’t been moving for some time, and fired several shots into her stomach with his carbine, proclaiming “Now she’s dead!”. This comment echoes the signature remarks made by previous school shooters, showing how, once again, Gill is following the script.

Afterwards, Gill exchanged several shots with the officers on the mezzanine, stopping at one point to put his own gun under his chin declaring that ‘today is his last day.’ Then, suddenly changing his mind, he reopened fire on the mezzanine where several police officers remained hidden, waiting for an opportunity to fire back. Taking the same male student hostage again along with another male student, Gill ordered them to walk in front of him with their hands behind their heads, crossing the atrium and advancing toward the exit at which point, one of the officers, seeing a clear opportunity, fired two shots, hitting Gill in the elbow. It was at this moment, perhaps feeling that the end was near, that Gill fell to his knees, inserted his Glock .45 inside his mouth, and fired one last shot, embodying his successful masculine exit.

II. Testing the Theory

Earlier, we established that, according to the media, school shooters usually 1) find themselves on the social fringe of their environment, 2) maintain difficult relationships with women, and 3) are subjected to repeated acts of bullying. Based on data provided by Detective Michael Arruda from *Le Service de police de la Ville de Montréal* (SPVM), who has investigated the Dawson shooting, as well as data from the official coroner’s report of the incident, the following section presents the details of Gill’s life up to the shooting, paying special attention to experiences of social exclusion, bullying, and difficult relationships with women. All of the excerpts from Kimveer Gill’s blog were taken from the online article in *La Presse* titled *Kimveer Gill: chronologie d'une folie* by the group *Technaute.ca* published September 15th 2006 which featured the entirety of his online journal. His VampireFreaks blog is no longer available as it was taken down by the S.P.V.M. shortly after the shooting.

Gill was undeniably on the social fringe and had been for quite some time before the shooting. First and foremost, he self-identified as and took pride in being an outcast, as this differentiated him from the ‘jocks.’ He writes on his blog on the website VampireFreaks.com:

“**Jocks and preps** - January 18, 2006, 09:41:pm

I'm so sick of hearing about jocks and preps making life hard for the goths and others who look different, or are different.

The other day on T.V. they were talking about this 15 year old kid that was killed by the cops, cuz' he took a fake gun to school. Then they said he was emotionally disturbed and suicidal. Aaaaa, Duh!! If people were making your life a living hell wouldn't you be hurt emotionally.

How come no one ever talks about those MOTHER FUCKING JOCKS AND PREPS who's fault it is. Oh no. Heaven forbid. We couldn't possibly say that. Why does society applaud jocks? I don't understand. They are the worse kind of people on earth. And the preps are no better, they think they're better than others.....but they're not.

And all of society applauds the jocks and preps. As if we are all supposed to be like them. Newsflash motherfuckers:

We will never be like them. NEVER.

VAMPIREFREAKS RULE

GOTH RULE

FUCK YA

GOTH, GOTH, GOTH, GOTH, GOTH, GOTH, GOTH”

This post, written eight months before the shooting, is representative of Gill's worldview. He seemed to perceive society in binary terms: one can either be a 'jock/prep' or 'different' – a difference which is linked, for Gill, to goth culture. However, while these two categories exist, Gill strongly believes that society encourages its subjects, himself included, to conform to the former category: "All of society applauds the jocks and preps." In other words, Gill perceived a social pressure to act as a 'jock,' but chose to act differently.

Furthermore, in this online diary, Gill clearly identifies with the young man who brought a fake gun to school. We can speculate that this affinity marked the beginning of his interest in the school shooting script. While it is difficult to confirm this speculation, the dates on which he was writing seem to correspond with the incident at Milwee Middle School, during which 15-year-old Christopher Penle was shot and killed by a SWAT team for bringing a toy gun modeled after a Beretta to his school. According to the medical examiner, Gill had started accumulating guns and regularly visiting the shooting range as early as August 2005. Therefore, while it is difficult to ascertain the exact moment at which Gill started to plan for the shooting, his interest in the school shooting script remains evident.

The medical examiner's report reveals that Gill struggled with several bouts of depression, beginning as early as 2004. Gill had consulted a psychiatrist, who recommended that he seek the aid of a community organization to help control his alcohol consumption, listed at two to seven drinks per day. Gill also mentioned his suicidal thoughts to the therapist, which involved jumping in front of a truck. He was prescribed an anti-depressant, which he stopped taking after a short period. His last visit to the CLSC took place in January 2005, after having suffered an injury sustained during a fight at a party. He apparently left without obtaining a consultation.

The medical examiner writes:

"Generally speaking, he is a rather socially inhibited young man who feels inferior in the presence of others. His social network is very limited. His self-esteem is minimal. He is not known to have had a girlfriend" (Coroner's report, File NO.:133713-01, Ref. NO:A-155370).

Gill's social isolation was at an all-time high in the period before the shooting. During this time, he spent most of his time locked in his room playing and watching violent media. He also spent a significant amount of time driving his mother – who had been diagnosed with breast cancer – to her medical appointments. Detective Arruda affirms that Gill lost his job during this period because of repetitive absences and lateness caused by his mother's medical appointments. The medical examiner, however, writes that Gill lost his job at the plant because of layoffs, and further maintains that “he fears judgment of others to the point where he prefers leaving a job or isolating himself instead of facing criticism” (Coroner's report, File NO.:133713-01, Ref. NO:A-155370). By the time of the Dawson shooting, Gill had been without employment for over a year.

Detective Arruda recalls the strange father-son dynamic of the family. Gill's father, a man who left India with his wife to start a family in Canada, saw Gill's life as a failure to meet his expectations. He had wanted his son to be educated, but Gill had failed to complete college, abandoning his studies after only one semester. At the time of the shooting, father and son had been frequently arguing about Gill's lifestyle and his unemployment. Arruda also notes that Gill's mother often felt caught in the middle of these arguments, trying to defend her son while struggling to uphold the family's traditional patriarchal values. Gill, far from being a traditional Indian son, marched to the beat of his own drum, so to speak, and had completely withdrawn into his own gothic universe. It is perhaps at this very point, failing to uphold his father's – as well as societies – expectations, so aptly described earlier by Guffman, that he perhaps found himself seeking a masculine exit. Furthermore, Arruda explains that Gill had been intercepted drunk driving in his mother's car a few months before and had his license suspended. He was supposed to stand trial shortly after the shooting for this infraction. This important detail, which Gill had apparently kept from his father, corroborates Newman's proposition that school shooters often decide to act when their life circumstances make them feel cornered, in need of an exit (Newman, 2004).

❖ Difficult Relationships with Women

As mentioned above, Gill enjoyed a very close relationship with his mother, who, according to detective Arruda, often tried to intercede between Gill and his father. Arruda explains that Gill's mother regularly defended her son against the father's disapproval of his lifestyle and unemployment. However, this appears to be the only positive relationship Gill shared with a woman: the medical examiner maintains that Gill is not known to ever have had a girlfriend.

On his blog, Gill wrote:

“Can't sleep - January 23, 2006, 04:20:am

It's so late. But I'm not sleepy. Arrgghhhh. Just listening to Manson and drinking JD's whiskey. Yup. I know, I know, not too interesting, but it is 4 in the morning.

Insomnia.....Insomnia.....Insomnia.....

Saying that word makes me want to sleep, but I can't.

I wonder what happened to Barbara Borelli from High School? Not that I ever really knew her much. But when you're in High School, you don't really realize, that after graduation, you're never ever going to see most of those people ever again. If I'd a known that, I would'a at least told her I liked her. Maybe hung out with her a bit after school, would'a been fun. Meh, she probably didn't like me anyway. She was always full of energy, running here and there. LOL. I wonder if she's still like that. Guess I'll never know.”

This quotation makes evident Gill's lack of confidence, his emotional vulnerability and his inability to approach the girl he liked in high school. On March 13th, he went on to write: “Most of the fucking men on this earth don't deserve the women they have”. Then, on September 4th 2006, just nine days before the shooting, he once again discussed his unreciprocated love for

Barbara Borelli:

“Where's Waldo? I think not! Where's Barbara is the true question!! - September 04, 2006, 03:57:am

I was thinking of Barbara Borelli yesterday.

I saw her in a dream. She was just standing there smiling at me. She looked like a princess. All in white clothes, and she was just smiling, the most beautiful smile, but didn't say anything, and i just looked at her, i tried to look at her ears to see how many piercings she had by now, but couldn't see anything other than her face. There was a bright white light shining from all over, around her body, from the ground up, from the sky down, all over, a super bright white light. I couldn't stop looking in her eyes, it almost felt like if i stopped gazing into her eyes, that i would die. For a second i thought she was trying to tell me something, I wanted to run up to her and hold her, and touch her, to see if she was real, cuz' this dream felt different than others i've had. But i couldn't move. I wanted to look down to see if there was something holding my feet and keeping me from moving, but i couldn't take my eyes off her.

It was weird. Cuz' usually I have dreams about people being murdered, hung, getting shot in the head, and stuff like that. Sometimes it's me that that stuff is happening to, and it's always dark and cold. But this was so different.

I wonder what happened to her? She was a girl that went to my high school. We hardly ever spoke, we were in like two different groups of friends, so our paths rarely crossed. She always looks so preoccupied with stuff. I liked her, guess I should have told her or something, just to let her know and stuff, not that anything would have happened, but it would'a been nice.

I wonder what she's up to? Maybe she owns her own business or something (seemed like something she'd like). It always made me smile when she went running down the halls, screaming at the top of her lungs, arms and legs flailing in every direction. Like some sort of escaped mental patient or something (I mean that in a good way). She was really sweet. (But loud) Bet if she ever stumbled upon my web page, she'd hunt me down and smack me for that. lol.

Wonder if she'd have let me call her Bar-bar if we had been friends. Bar-bar sounds nice to me. Hey! Hey Bar-bar!! Where are you? You're not under my bed, or in my basement, or dancing on the roof!!

:(

Have fun Barb :)”

Clearly, Gill’s un-proclaimed love for Barbara haunted him quite regularly. Perhaps it was his lack of confidence in his masculine persona that rendered him incapable of approaching his peers.

In addition to his entries about Barbara in particular, Gill voiced his frustrations about women in general. In the following excerpt, Gill rants about hip-hop culture and its objectification of women:

“Have you seen some of their videos that play 24/7 on all the music channels worldwide? It's all image. all the girls are acting like whores, sorry, let me rephrase that...all the girls are whores. I can't understand what has happened to this world.”

The underlying recurrent themes in hip-hop music videos make it seem easy for men to be loved and adulated by women. Unable to reenact and reap the rewards of the hegemonic masculinity presented in most hip-hop music videos, Gill consoled himself by insulting the women,

disparaging them for wanting to be treated with disrespect. It could be argued that this particular reading of hip-hop music videos enabled him to justify his lack of romantic relationships: he wasn't single because of his inability to approach women, but rather because of women's desire to be "talked to like this, and treated like this".

Two weeks before the attack Gill wrote about women again:

"What's with all the bitches? It's almost as though there was some sort of bitch convention somewhere, and 85% of the women went and all agreed to be bitches forever. The other 15% were spared. But having all these bitches in one room gave them a great power. A power not yet seen in this world. It's a special attack move of theirs. It transforms them into super bitches. It's so powerful, that they can only remain in that state for a short period of time, then they go back to being ordinary bitches."

These few journal entries point to how Gill perceived women and how he perceived his gendered self through a repudiation and denigration of the feminine. To what extent could these experiences of being unable to approach women have influenced Gill? What role did they play in his decision to pursue the school shooting script? Nearing the end of his life, Gill seemed to have concluded that women were not attracted to him because they didn't want to be respected. In his commentary about hip-hop music videos, Gill seemed to believe that women only desired what can only be described as a hyper-masculine man: the exact embodiment of the hegemonic. Previously unable to conform to this standard, Gill sought solace in the masculine exit provided by the school shooting script. He chose to die impersonating the school shooter, an undeniably hegemonic masculine persona.

❖ Experiences of Bullying

According to Detective Arruda, there is no proof that Gill was ever bullied in high school. However, Arruda does mention one related episode that occurred during Gill's high school years:

Gill, seeing another kid being bullied, decided to call the police, as he believed that school officials were unable and/or uninterested in helping victims of bullying. Arruda states that Gill seemed to have claimed the role of avenger – while his friends remember him as quiet and shy, he was nonetheless always quick to defend others from so-called ‘bullies’, ‘jocks,’ and ‘preps’. For Gill, these categories of people were essentially the same, and later in life, as we have seen, he seemed to have understood the whole of society in those terms.

Gill also grew increasingly paranoid. Several times, on his blog, he wrote that police officers were watching him and his home. He believed that officers, dressed as ‘gothic girls,’ were spying on him. Gill never made an explicit online mention of his plan to commit a school shooting, and the following passage certainly begins to explain why:

“Warning - June 11, 2006, 04:35:am

Look out friends

The RCMP and CSIS in Canada and Local Law enforcement and F.B.I. in the States have been scouring this web site during the last 3 months. Looking to arrest you guys and girls for nothing.

Ever since that girl from Alberta killed her family, they've been going through the pros, and have arrested dozens of people because of what they wrote in their journals (like talking about killing someone), or the pics they got (like holding a gun) or whatever.

Just be careful about what you write. Select "Private Entry" for anything that might be perceived as suspicious. For now.”

It is reasonable to believe that Gill himself would have put his own advice into practice, refraining from detailing his plans in the blogosphere in order to keep them in motion. However, Arruda did allude to the fact that Gill might have shared his plan with a friend, though this statement was never confirmed and charges against the friend were quickly dropped.

Most of Gill's writings center around goth culture, which he perceived as being under attack by mainstream culture. For example, on February 5th 2006, he wrote:

“I'm tired of hearing about goth and emo people being picked on, just because of the way they look or dress. It's not right It's not fair”

As becomes clear from the bulk of his writing, Gill's hatred of 'jocks' and 'preps' played a decisive role in his decision to embrace the school shooting script. His fascination with the Columbine pair, whom he saw as heroes, undeniably inspired him to do the same.

❖ Other Motivations

While previous school shootings provided Gill with a script to reenact in order to stage his masculine escape from a society that he felt had denied him his rightful gender-based rewards, violent video games and movies supported his state of mind. As Athens and Newman have proposed, the repetitive viewing of violent media, while not at cause, can certainly be considered a factor in his downward spiral. His reclusive lifestyle likely made it increasingly difficult for Gill to conceptualize the outside world in terms other than 'Jocks' vs 'Geeks'. Furthermore, I hypothesize that media coverage of school shootings – which often reinforces this dichotomy – had influenced Gill to believe that a war was being waged by school shooters against bullies. Finally, it is safe to say that, while undiagnosed with any psychological condition, Gill's “psychological frailty,” as described by the coroner's report, played a role in his decision to act.

We clearly see that, through an analysis of the Dawson school shooting in light of previous news coverage and with Newman's proposition to view school shooting as cultural scripts, we gain a much better understanding of Gill's actions. Furthermore, as this research hypothesized, the school shooting cultural script appeals to young men because of its embedded masculinity culture discourse. Overconformists, like Gill see in the script an exit to their unsatisfying life, an ultimate way to claim masculinity in its most hegemonic form.

Conclusion

On the very day that this research officially began, Adam Lanza was entering Sandy Hook Elementary School. There, he would kill 20 children and six staff members before committing suicide. He had also murdered his mother on the day of the shooting. In the extensive article “The Reckoning,” Andrew Solomon of *The New Yorker* states that Lanza, just like others before him, following the same sinister script, was dressed in black and armed with heavy army gear. He was described as a loner, as fascinated with violent games and, more importantly, with other school shootings and mass murders (Solomon 2014). He had no girlfriend and shared a complicated relationship with his mother, who was described as overbearing. A Word document entitled ‘Selfish’ was discovered on his computer, in which he describes how all women are selfish (Solomon 2014). We are also told that, in 2009:

“Adam developed his private obsession with killing. He started editing Wikipedia entries on various well-known mass murderers and seems to have been eerily well informed. But although there were still no outward signs of violent tendencies, he was becoming ever harder to deal with” (“The Reckoning”, Andrew Solomon, March 17th 2014, *The New Yorker*).

Lanza’s planning and execution make apparent how he – wishing to pursue, like other before him, the ultimate masculine exit – adopted and closely followed the cultural script of school shooting. Over the two year span of this research, many more young men have followed the same script, and sadly, it appears that many more will follow it in the future, at least until the script loses its salience or becomes something else altogether.

This research has shown that school shootings have undeniably become a cultural script. While most researchers have overlooked the fact that all school shooters have been young men, this research has treated that fact as central to the study of school shooting, arguing that the school

shooting script has exclusively attracted young men precisely because it is *also* a masculinity script. While I do not suggest that the masculine nature of the script is *essentially* linked to its violence, I do argue that violence and masculinity are interrelated with regards to the contemporary state of hegemonic masculinity in North America. Furthermore, I have argued that school shooters are not simply loners, as they are depicted in news media, but rather they are better understood as overconformists in a culture that demands social success, popularity, and athleticism from their men, one that expects them to inspire respect and fear from other men, as well as admiration and desire from women. These young men, for many reasons, were unable to achieve these cultural ideals and thus felt a great deal of anger towards society, which they blamed for the construction and encouragement of these ideals.

In conclusion, this research has certainly paved the way for further inquiries. Indeed, many questions remain unanswered. For example, how are the gender ideals of masculinity presented and understood by teenagers in a school environment? What are the links between masculinity culture and violent crime in schools? Is there an institutionalized system in schools that reinforces the salience of school shootings? Finally, this research poses an essential but troubling question: Why and how does our culture continuously produce bogeyboys?

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